The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade

John Wright

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The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade is the full length history of the northbound trade in black slaves across the Sahara to North Africa (Maghreb). It reveals an ancient, persistent but obscure traffic, a basic but largely overlooked feature of the historical economy and society of the Sahara and North Africa. John Wright unveils the true scale and scope of the trade, giving wholly new and detailed statistical accounts of the slave traffic along different desert roads and through Saharan, Maghrebi and Mediterranean markets.

The book's new research reveals in great detail:

- the numbers of slaves traded, their treatment and losses on the road;
- the main slaving roads and markets;
- North African slave shipments to other Mediterranean ports;
- traders' prices and profits between Central Africa and final points of sale;
- difficulties of abolishing North African slavery and a slave trade sanctioned by time, custom and religion;
- the trade's long-term impact on the Sahara and northern Africa.

Using detailed historical statistics and eyewitness accounts, John Wright's study supports and widens current scholarly examinations of Africans' enslavement of fellow-Africans and their delivery to local and external markets. Shedding light on the important but under-studied Trans-Saharan slave trade, this text is basic reading for students and researchers in North African, Saharan and Mediterranean history.

John Wright, formerly the BBC Arabic Service's chief political commentator and analyst, specialises in North Africa, the Sahara, the Middle East and the international oil industry. His publications include books, papers and articles on Libyan and Saharan travel history.

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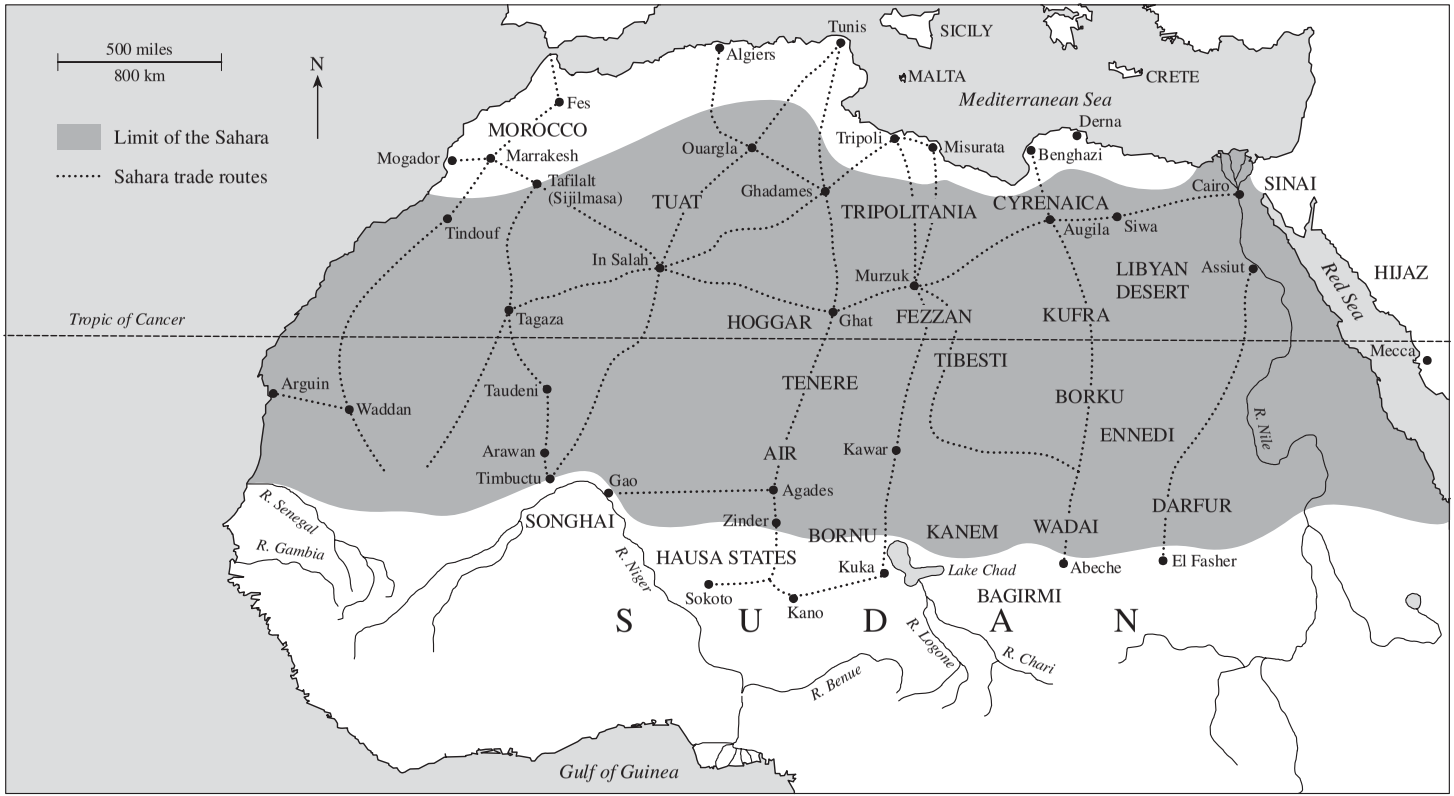

Frontispiece: The trade routes of Northern Africa

Preface

This book has had a long gestation. Its origins go back some forty years, to the days before Moammar Gadafi's Libyan revolution, when I lived and worked in Tripoli. But the need to write other books and material on Libya, its history and its trans-Saharan connections, took precedence, pushing this project into the background. I had long supposed that the work of the British mid-Saharan vice consulates at Murzuk and Ghadames in the 1840s and '50s on the desert slave trade, its abolition and replacement by 'legitimate' commerce, would in itself make a worthwhile study. It was only when I began to test and research the idea in more detail in the 1990s that I realised the need for a much wider account of slavery in North Africa, and especially the trans-Saharan slave trade that supplied it over many centuries. The present study is based on a PhD thesis, completed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, in 1998. That basic text has been greatly reduced and re-ordered in some parts and much expanded in others. A thesis is not a book, and any remaining similarities between the two texts are now largely coincidental.

John Wright
Suna, Verbania, Italy

Introduction

The subject of this book is the trade in black slaves across the Sahara to North Africa (the Maghreb). This was one of Africa's four main slaving outlets. The others were the 'modern' Atlantic trade from the west coast to the Americas and the Caribbean; the trade from the east coast across the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and western India; and the Nile Valley trade from the eastern Sudan to Egypt. The Atlantic traffic lasted only some 400 years (fifteenth–nineteenth centuries). The others were ancient and persistent and between them over very many centuries they perhaps delivered as many Africans into foreign servitude as did the massive Atlantic trade during its much shorter existence. For the slaves, the experience of being force marched across inner Africa or the Sahara under malign slave-drivers could be quite as horrific as the experience of those on the notorious Atlantic 'middle passage'. But one difference was that the Islamic societies served by the Saharan trade demanded twice as many servile women as men, almost the reverse of the Atlantic ratio, and once slaves had crossed the Sahara, most were better treated than those on the American plantations. But black slaves did not thrive in Islam, and the Saharan traffic was thus largely a *replacement* of a servile population constantly wasted by early deaths, low reproduction rates, and liberation (manumission).

This study has moderately flexible bounds of historical time and geographical space. It covers the whole of the Maghreb, the Sahara and the Sudan (in the broadest sense) west of the Nile Valley, as well as the routes of the Mediterranean slave ships from North Africa to the Levant and the Ottoman Aegean and Balkans. While there are backward glances into Africa's pre-Islamic past, the main period covered is from the coming of the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century, with the resultant opening of a *regular* black slave trade across the central desert, and its official abolition by the twentieth century. There is special emphasis on the years around 1850 because the central Saharan and Mediterranean traffic were then subject to closer statistical scrutiny than ever before, or since.

The following chapters discuss the patterns and workings of this trade. Based on the long-distance camel caravan, it seems barely to have changed or developed its organisation, its business methods or any other aspect since

it emerged as a sophisticated new enterprise in the early Middle Ages. The exception – and it was an important one – was the readiness of traders (perhaps most often in the nineteenth century) to change their routes and open new ones. Thus they also influenced the fortunes of mid- and pre-desert markets and entrepots, and, to a lesser degree, their trade outlets in the Maghreb and the Sudan. Such choice was dictated by changing environmental, security, political, economic, social and other factors either within the desert itself, or to the north or south of it. Individual chapters are accordingly devoted to some of the main Saharan slaving centres, the different roads and slave-drivers serving them, and their onward connections to other Saharan, Maghrebi or Sudanese markets. Due weight is also given to some of the main North African slaving ports, and especially those in modern Libya (Tripoli, Misurata, Benghazi) that shipped many of their newly arrived trade slaves to other Mediterranean markets. Prominence is again given to the patterns and workings of the central and eastern Saharan trades because there is more primary statistical and other information about them.

The yearly slave trade reports compiled in the 1840s and 1850s by British consular officials in Tripoli, Misurata, Benghazi, Derna and, above all, at the mid-Saharan slaving oases of Ghadames and Murzuk, provide fairly reliable, consistent and plausible runs of figures that stand comparison with each other and with other sources, such as they are. These reports confirm that the number of slaves taken across the desert was not as great as has been supposed – perhaps 8,000/year at most by all possible roads, compared with estimates of 20,000 or more (see Chapter 3 and 13).

Such figures also challenge attempts to ignore slavery and the slave trade in North Africa and the Sahara, and thus their essential historical role in those societies and their trading economies. There has been a certain reluctance among Arab scholars, in particular, even to acknowledge the existence of slavery in the Arab World, or the Saharan, Nilotic and East African trades that supplied it. Such closing of the collective historical mind seems likely in the long run to cause unfortunate distortions in Saharan history. But some Moroccan scholars have led a serious historical debate on issues of African, Saharan and Maghrebi slavery, slave-trading and abolition. These are all subjects that, no matter how distasteful or shameful they may seem, do need to be studied and publicly aired if a society, with due regard for historical objectivity and balance, is to come to terms with its own past. It is surely reasonable that present and future generations receive their history contaminated neither by cringing political correctness nor by a selective popular amnesia.

1 Slaves, slavery and the Sahara

> A state of subordination, and certain inequalities of rank and condition, are inevitable in every stage of civil society; but when this subordination is carried to so great a length, that the persons and services of one part of the community are entirely at the disposal of another part, it may then be denominated a state of slavery; and in this condition of life, a great body of the Negro inhabitants of Africa have continued from the most early period of their history; with this aggravation, that their children are born to no other inheritance.
>
> Mungo Park

Many people have worked unpaid as the slaves, dependants or bondsmen of others. To sell one's labour, perhaps as a so-called 'wage slave', is a modern habit. Slavery may only have emerged with the agro-pastoral revolution, for hunter-gatherers need no servile assistants. Common to many places, eras and cultures, slavery was taken for granted as a usual, perhaps regrettable, but very necessary social condition; so, too, were the common risks, especially for travellers, of kidnap or capture for enslavement or ransom.[1]

The belief that slavery and the slave trade were morally wrong began to gain wide acceptance only with the British movement for abolition in the late eighteenth century. But the changes in public opinion that were to make slavery and slave trade abolition a popular ideology of Victorian Britain were largely confined to the black slavery of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade that supplied it. British Atlantic slavers had, after all, been by far the most successful for some two centuries, and Britain was the first to make amends by halting its slave traffic. Opinion has been so well formed that American slavery and the associated Atlantic slave trade are in the popular imagination still the sole, reprehensible models for so many other, similar but unknown or disregarded practices of slaving or slavery from different times and places. Thus far less is understood, known or acknowledged of slavery in the Islamic World, of its supply with captives from Europe, Asia and Africa, and especially the trade in black slaves across the Sahara that lasted until well into the twentieth century, if not the twenty-first.

Whether by capture, purchase or birth, a slave is a property owned by, and in the power of, another person. As a chattel, the slave lacks freedom or personal rights. Essentially he is an outsider whose separation from kin and community deepens his powerlessness. Thus a newly bought slave is like a helpless, new-born child, starting life afresh, with identity and social position defined solely through the master.[2] Indeed, the Ahaggar Tuareg of the central Sahara, whose slaves are 'the fictive children of the master',[3] even claim that 'without the master, the slave does not exist'.[4]

The enslavement of outsiders has usually been a forceful exploitation of human resources. Unless they had remarkable looks, or had skills or education, or had survived the eunuch-maker's crude surgery, African slaves were usually traded as raw, unimproved goods. So long as they were enmeshed in protracted and often complex slave-making, marshalling, marketing and delivery systems, most black trade slaves were simply treated as goods in transit. But when at last sold to final owners as robust labour for the mines or plantations of the Americas, or as soldiers, domestics and/or sexual partners in the Islamic World, they had to be 'seasoned', moulded to their new working, social, religious and cultural environments. 'Slaves were seen as so much malleable material, easily deprived of form, and easily shaped to the master's will.'[5] Force and other forms of coercion would be used in this process, especially with male slaves. Muslim slave-buyers, in particular, preferred to bring young, untrained girls and boys into the closed environment of the Islamic household. There they could be given the necessary practical training and religious instruction as future adult members of a properly regulated Muslim (or sometimes Jewish) home. Free sexual access to these domestic slaves marked them off from all other people, as well as their juridical classification as property.

Slaves were kept because they were useful; they were sexually available; versatile; mobile; capable of supporting and sometimes reproducing themselves. They could make up for scarce human resources in a particular society, being given work or military duties free people could or would not do. Depending on age, sex, appearance and skills, they might be valuable, marketable investments and redeemable assets, perhaps to be given as tribute or presents, and often conferring prestige on their rich or otherwise important owners: 'wealth in people was often thought more important than wealth in property'.[6] Yet the evidence suggests that existing slave populations were only maintained, let alone increased, by a constant supply of fresh captives, for many slaves failed to reproduce themselves.[7] The most notable exception was British North America (the later USA) where 'it is a commonplace that the slave population was … the only one to reproduce itself and even grow'.[8] The trade supplying slave societies or slave-owning societies usually failed fully to meet their demands, and only rarely dumped surplus slaves on them. It has been estimated that the 'service life' of a slave in Islam (the time between final purchase and death or manumission) was a mere seven years (when a slave's accumulated labour was supposed to match

his purchase price). This implies that about 15 per cent of the existing slave pool had to be renewed every year just to maintain numbers.[9] Slave communities in the Islamic World were constantly eroded by early deaths in alien climates and disease environments; by poor treatment and living conditions; by the freedom of children born of free fathers and slave women (for, in contrast to common American practice, no Muslim father could have a slave child); and by manumission (but in both Islam and Jewry the freed slave still often depended on the former master).

The first 'modern' people to create this constant demand for large numbers of foreign slaves were the Arabs 'and their light-skinned converts to Islam from Morocco to Iran'. This demand lasted from the seventh century until, in some places, well into the twentieth.[10] Once established, the Islamic Caliphal empire, dominating trade and communications between the three Old World continents, drew on slaves from beyond the frontiers of Islam, where *jihad* (holy war) was legitimately waged against heathens rather than Christian or Jewish infidels.[11] For many centuries the peoples of inner Asia and Europe (especially the pagan Slavs from whom the very word *slave* derives) were main sources of captives. But for the Islamic World the most lasting and seemingly limitless slave reservoir was sub-Saharan Africa, where slavery was endemic and where surplus slaves were readily available for export by the Red Sea, down the Nile Valley, or across the Sahara.

The Arab and wider Islamic Worlds needed slaves for sundry economic and social roles.[12] There was some heavy male slave labour to be done; some regimes sometimes recruited black slave armies or corps of black slave guards; and some male slaves became the trusted agents of their masters. But both North Africa and the Middle East normally lacked the great agricultural estates, the *latifundia* of Roman type, or American-style plantations, worked only by slave-gangs. Thus the main demand for slaves in the Islamic World was for women and girls as household servants, entertainers and/or as concubines. 'The most common and enduring purpose for acquiring slaves in the Arab World was to exploit them for sexual purposes.'[13] This seems reasonable when it is accepted (and the slave trade returns of nineteenth-century British consular officials in North Africa and the Sahara confirm) that about two-thirds of slaves taken across the desert were women and girls, either to be sold singly, or to be presented in a group to the appropriate authority as tribute, a tax settlement or a gift.[14]

Slavery continued as an economic institution so long as owners could profit from slave labour, after the costs of daily subsistence, and the original purchase price, had been met. Such, at least, may have been the case in fully fledged *slave societies* where slave labour underpinned the basic economy. But few slaves were economically productive in the *slave-owning* societies of Islam. In Muslim North Africa, the military, labouring and domestic slaves (both black Africans imported across the Sahara and white Europeans from Mediterranean Christendom) made scant contribution to the economy. (Exceptions were perhaps southern Morocco and the western Sahara and

Sahel.) Wealth was generated mainly by other forms of free or dependent labour: by small-scale cultivators or, in the southern oases, by a class of debased black serfs, the *harratin;* by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal herders and their family slaves; by merchants, traders and pedlars; and by artisans and craftsmen (many of them Jews or Christian renegades). The reluctance of women, at least in the medieval Islamic–Jewish societies of Egypt and neighbouring lands, to go into service, and particularly domestic service, is noted by S.D. Goitein in his monumental study based on the documents of the Cairo *geniza*, *A Mediterranean Society*. Thus 'the female slaves formed a vital section of the working population, insofar as they provided domestic help, a type of work shunned by free women … the larger households could hardly do without [such] domestic help.'[15] Berber women slaves were valued for housework; black women were considered docile ('born to slavery'), robust and excellent wet-nurses; Greeks could be trusted with precious things around the house.[16] Such slaves and concubines, unlike the slave-gangs of the Americas, may have made domestic life easier and the choice of sexual partner more varied in the middle-class homes of North Africa and the Middle East, but they contributed little to the local economy or the processes of long-term capital accumulation.

While not usually put to productive work, slaves in the Islamic World enabled their owners 'to enjoy the comfort afforded by having a large domestic staff, kept under strict control'. Owners apparently could rely not only on the tacit consent and cooperation of most of their slaves but, as slave-owners, they were assured the moral sanction of public opinion, custom and Islam in their dealings with them, including sexual relations.[17] The Koran recognises that slavery in principle satisfies religious scruples, while St Augustine accepts that slavery is contrary to basic human equality, but as a consequence of sin it is tolerable as an institution.[18] Thus Muslims, like Christians, could readily justify the enslavement of pagan Africans as a means of leading them from the darkness of ignorance into the enlightenment and community of the true faith. African slaves shipped to Christian (and particularly Roman Catholic) destinations were routinely baptised and given Christian names on embarkation or as they arrived in the Americas. Those exported from pagan Africa to the Islamic World sooner or later became Muslims, to a greater or lesser degree.[19]

Under *sharia* law, new slaves could be recruited only by birth in slavery or by capture in war. Muslims could not enslave fellow-Muslims: a Muslim thus reduced to slavery suffered a grievous injustice, but a slave who became a Muslim remained a slave: all depended on the sequence of events. The status of a non-Muslim slave who converted was not altered by his Islam.[20] Nevertheless, even if slavery in the Islamic World was more a matter of religion than race, Muslim slave-traders in sub-Saharan Africa were sometimes unable to resist the temptation of enslaving free black Muslims merely because they were black. For in the Sudan,[21] where Islamisation was in places so gradual that it still continues, the elusive frontiers between the

Dar al-Islam (The House of Islam) and the as yet unconquered *Dar al-Harb* (literally, *The House of War*) for centuries marked off those benighted lands where enslavement by whatever means (war, raiding, kidnapping, punishment, buying or barter) was a licit activity. Thus 'in the Muslim view, slavery becomes a simile for the heathen condition – a symbolic representation of the very antithesis of Islam'.[22] Even the great fourteenth-century Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun believed that negroes were submissive to slavery because 'they have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals'.[23]

In Islam, slaves may have been 'a mere commodity generally ranking with the domestic animals', or in Moroccan society could be 'perceived as beasts with the faculty of communicating and being believers'.[24] Thus some of those kept at the great religious centre at Smara in the western Sahara in the late nineteenth century lived in open pens with the goats and camels.[25] But slavery in the Islamic World was usually very different from the harsh mine or plantation slavery of the Americas, and a strong case has always been made for its benign face. The slave in Islam had the same spiritual value and eternal expectations as the free man, although, unless emancipated, he had simply to resign himself to a lifetime's inferior status. While Islamic law and practice made no provision for the abolition of slavery or the slave trade, Islam did try 'to moderate the institution and mitigate its legal and moral aspects', even if there were often gulfs between doctrine and practice.[26] The Koran accepts the existence of the institution of slavery but refers only rarely to it, mostly stressing the merits of manumission.[27] Koranic references urging real kindness towards slaves, and the virtues of manumission attributed to the Prophet and his companions in the *hadith* – 'do not forget that they are your brothers' – effectively applied to Muslim slaves only. Most slaves, and especially the females, no doubt enjoyed such prescribed treatment after they had been bought to be kept by final owners, and had by then become at least nominal Muslims, with a re-sale value that in some respects also protected them from severe maltreatment. But there were clearly many exceptions to the norm, and wide ranges of living conditions and treatment. On their long trek to their point of final sale, many slaves had seen the malign face of Muslim slavery, with a level of mistreatment in every way comparable with the worst excesses of the Atlantic trade. Such was the common experience of the so-called 'trade slaves' – all those unfortunates enmeshed in the long transition from point of first capture to final sale. For it was an established fact that 'trade slaves' were the worst used of all. The gaggles of slaves forced across the Sahara with large or small northbound caravans were in the absolute power of nominally Muslim slave-drivers who had themselves to contend with all the hardships and dangers of desert travel. Such guardians were hardly likely to show the same benign face as the indulgent masters of well-appointed bourgeois Islamic households of assimilated slave domestics and concubines.[28] Slaves physically and mentally scarred by their recent experiences could only expect better conditions and treatment once

they had been bought to be kept, and could then start the processes of assimilation into a new social and cultural host-environment.[29] Many paid a very high price indeed before they were able to enjoy the vaunted mildness of Muslim domestic slavery. For black men, women and children forced across the Sahara, such 'enjoyment' was reserved for those who first survived the extreme trials of that rite of passage under the mostly malign handling of Muslim slave-drivers.

By the time slaves reached their final point of sale in North Africa or the Levant, they were already nominal Muslims with at least some Arabic, for there were no buyers for a 'pagan' slave with no known speech. The slave-dealers had ensured that the male slaves were circumcised as necessary and that all slaves had been given Arabic names. 'These names were often peculiar to slaves and tended to have meanings which were redolent of happiness, good fortune and favour from God.'[30] Such, at least, seems to have been the practice in modern times; but in the High Middle Ages (tenth–thirteenth centuries) there was apparently less concern for slaves' religion. Thus Goitein has found that 'the Islamic injunction that no one should be converted to any religion except Islam was [then] largely disregarded. Many male and female slaves must have been baptised to Judaism.'[31]

Yet after their capture and enslavement, pagan Africans' introduction to and instruction in Islam were at best cursory and misleading. Probably the first Muslims they met in inner Africa were raiders and traders on essentially temporal slaving campaigns, whatever their religious justification for their actions might have been. Such freebooters were unlikely to have been much concerned with the spiritual welfare or conversion of their black pagan captives whose very survival was still in doubt. Few slave-drivers and slave-dealers in the Sudan–Saharan trade were ideal models of the civilisation that most slaves in their charge were beginning to experience for the first time, or of the Islam they would be expected to accept, at least by the time they were sold to their final owners. If many such non-Arab slave-owners and slave-drivers as the Tebu and Tuareg of the central and west-central Sahara were themselves barely capable of teaching the trade slaves in their charge the few words of Arabic that would raise their value at market, they – together with the Arabic-speaking Moors of the western desert – were no better qualified to instruct them in their new faith. All Saharan peoples were regarded at best as casual and ignorant Muslims. Even by the twentieth century the Tuareg were judged to have been 'for most part … lukewarm and superficial converts'.[32] The Tebu had the worst reputation for religious laxity and indifference,[33] while Moors of the western desert were 'not usually strict in their observance of traditional Islamic ritual'.[34]

With few exceptions, such slavers were unable, and unlikely, to give any coherent account of or guidance in Islam to the pagans they brought across the desert. Nor did Arab slavers from the north seem to have been any more careful of the spiritual welfare of those in their charge. Saharan slavers' indifference was, after all, merely a reflection of the common North African

prejudice that the black pagan peoples of the inner continent were fit only for enslavement.[35] Yet acceptance of Islam was sooner or later to be an essential stage in breaking the individual slave's attachment to the past during the rite of passage to a new existence in an entirely new environment. But the fact was that the processes of any slave's Arabisation and Islamisation could start at almost any time and anywhere on the long physical and spiritual journey from pagan freedom to Islamic servitude. The end result might be very different, depending on the slave's various owners and experiences between first capture and final sale, and his or her personal attitude and adaptability.

That black trade slaves on their forced marches across the Sahara were treated as if they were still unconverted pagans (even if many were no longer so in practice) is attested by the scanty but invaluable accounts of European travellers. In the nineteenth century a few such witnesses began to penetrate the Saharan roads in company with some of the larger slaving caravans, for most northbound caravans had at least a few black slaves among the merchandise. They thus saw just how slavers handled their charges from day to day; only a few, valuable eunuchs and female slaves of exceptional looks and/or talents, or those sent as gifts or tribute, enjoyed special physical and spiritual treatment. Europeans' accounts of slave caravans are rare, impressionistic and sporadic; but these were eye-witnesses of a traffic that would otherwise have been unrecorded, for there were few such impressions before the nineteenth century.

Travellers were horrified by the casual inhumanity and prodigal indifference of slave-traders towards their charges. Even in death, they clearly considered their slaves as mere pagans, deserving neither respect nor burial: most dead slaves were simply left where they had fallen. This may have been understandable on difficult stretches of road, where no caravan-leader would risk all lives by halting for stragglers or to bury the dead. But it was harder to justify at wells and other resting places.[36]

Caravans held collective prayers at halting places, but it is not clear whether some of the male trade slaves were also invited to take part. Yet the fact is that some traders did try to ensure that both their male and female slaves, and especially the younger and more impressionable ones, were offered to final owners as instructed Muslims. This was especially the case with the more valuable slaves whose final price would be raised by their Islam, as also by their knowledge of Arabic.[37]

Some nineteenthth-century European sources suggest that few attempts to instruct slaves in Islam or the Arabic language were made until the very end of their trans-Saharan journeys. At resting places outside such important outlets as Benghazi, Tripoli and Marrakesh, some belated attention might be given to slaves' spiritual and linguistic education. This was while they were prepared for market by being decently clothed, coifed, oiled (to give their skins a sleek, 'healthy' sheen) and encouraged to put on some weight.[38] Yet that close observer of nineteenth-century Egyptian life, Edward Lane,

found that while most slaves were indeed converts to Islam, 'they are as little instructed in the rites of their religion; and still less in its doctrines'.[39]

A few black, formerly pagan, slaves became pious Muslims, integrated well into Maghrebi or Levantine Islamic society, and occasionally rose to positions of authority, but most did none of these things. Nominal Muslim slaves continued openly to practice their animistic rituals and, while the authorities might tolerate such behaviour, slaves were as a result largely excluded from their adoptive societies.[40] The persistence of such traditional beliefs and rituals seems partly to have been a defensive attitude of deracinated and economically and socially depressed communities trying to sustain memories of their origins and identity.

Such persistent practices seem to have reflected also the sheer inadequacy of the introduction of previous generations of trade slaves to the principles of orthodox Islam that they were supposed to have accepted, at least by the time they went to their final Muslim owners in the Maghreb or Levant. For the crossing of the Great Desert might have been regarded as a spiritual as well as a physical transition from the darkness of paganism and ignorance to the light of faith and civilisation. That many slaves, in moving from inner Africa, kept with them even in their later captivity, a baggage of still distinctly pagan, non-Islamic beliefs and practices suggests that the Sahara was not so much a barrier between African societies and cultures as a selective mesh or filter between the 'white' north and the black interior of the continent.

2 The Sahara

Grazing, war and trade

L'histoire c'est d'abord toute géographie.
Jules Michelet

Few places on earth are more desolate than the Sahara, the largest of the hot deserts. Taking on its present form some 4,000–5,000 years ago, it became a formidable obstacle to human contact. It separated 'black', inner Africa socially and culturally from its Mediterranean and Asian neighbours, while isolating the 'white' northern quarter to the north of the desert from the greater part of the continent to the south.

Yet the Sahara is not a closed frontier: the several difficult but not impossible ways across it have acted as filters to human contact. They have always allowed small groups of dedicated traders, travelling scholars and men of religion, as well as raiding warriors, to carry goods, ideas, influences and warfare into and across the desert. Historically, the north has been the more active mercantile, intellectual and technological partner in a limited two-way Saharan exchange system of sustained mutual benefit, and has usually dominated and exploited the south.

The Saharan environment is difficult because it is both very hot yet at times cold enough for frost; it has low precipitation and high evaporation; it lacks water and vegetation; it has many harsh and hostile landscapes and inhabitants; but above all because it is so vast. It is continental in scale, reaching almost without a break from the Atlantic coast of Mauritania to the Red Sea (3,500 miles) and from the Libyan Sirtica to Lake Chad and the River Niger (at least 1,250 miles). It covers a greater area than the continental USA, so that Tripoli is nearly as far from Lake Chad as it is from London, while the city of Fez in northern Morocco is much closer to Paris than to Timbuctu.

Saharan aridity is explained by the desert's position in the area of convergence north of the Equator, between the cold polar and warm equatorial air currents. The hot, moist air of the Equator disperses its humidity as rain over the tropical forests of West and Central Africa. Moving north, these masses sink over Saharan Africa as dry air at high pressure, dispersing clouds

and inhibiting precipitation. The Sahara is permanently influenced by the so-called Jet Stream, a confluence of winds at great height that encourages high pressure and inhibits rain-carrying cloud formation. The Libyan Desert of Cyrenaica and western Egypt is thus one of the driest places on earth, while most of the Sahara on average receives barely one inch/year of precipitation. Rainfall is also highly erratic, both from one year to another, and within any one year. The resultant lack of vegetation further increases aridity in a vicious natural cycle, exposing already denuded desert surfaces to strong, eroding winds.[1] Saharan 'weather' changes little from day to day. There is a 'summer', a hot season from May–September at a time of high sun, while 'winter' is a relatively cooler season with low sun, when freezing nights and early mornings are not unusual.[2]

At its greatest extent, the Sahara has wide varieties of terrain. Much is covered by steppes, vast plains of gravel or broken, rocky tablelands; pure sand deserts are only about one-fifth of the total area. The deep sandy 'deserts within deserts', the terrible 'lands of fear' avoided by prudent travellers, cover only about one-fifteenth of the whole. They include the Libyan Desert, the Ténéré of north-east Niger, and the great Ergs of the Algerian Sahara. Then there are the more favoured regions, with slightly higher rainfall (especially along the Atlantic coast in the west). The few centres of amenity, with enough water to support settled life, are either in the depressions or in the highlands. In the natural depressions, underground waters may be close to the surface, allowing irrigation from natural springs, wells or man-made subterranean aqueducts, the *foggara*.[3] A few of the resultant oases, or chains of oases, are large, populous, relatively prosperous and important; most are not. The mountain-blocks of the Sahara, among them the Hoggar of south-east Algeria and the Tibesti of the Libya–Chad borderlands, the highlands of Air in Niger, Ennedi in Chad and the uplands of Mauritania, all attract slightly more rain than the surrounding desert plains. They thus combine natural defensive advantage with the possibility of some subsistence cultivation and small-scale stock-raising. But all such centres of amenity are rare incidents in the overwhelming desert surroundings, and their mostly remote, isolated settlements or clusters of settlements may, before motor transport, have been days or possibly weeks of travel distant from even the nearest human neighbours.

Because of its location, Saharan Africa is always prone to desertification, although the climate has fluctuated markedly over the past 20,000 years.[4] A long dry spell was followed by a wet period of perhaps 10,000 years. This phase reached a peak about 9,500 years ago when Lake Chad became an inland sea as large as today's Caspian, contained between the foothills of Air, Hoggar, Tibesti, Ennedi and Darfur, and estimated to have received 16 times the present flow of water into the catchment area.[5] Northern Africa probably then offered many centres of amenity to its inhabitants, both 'white' caucasoid and 'black' pastoralists. Although a main north–south racial and cultural divide may already have been apparent, some assimilation

of white northerners and black southerners is likely from about 5000 to 2000 BC when a widespread, neolithic pastoral culture flourished in what is now the largest of deserts. This ideal, open landscape withered away when the desiccation of the Sahara, starting some 4,000 years ago, first turned woodlands into savannah and then into desert. Lake Chad withdrew towards its present shallow depression and the great Erg of Téneré and the fossil dunes of Kanem emerged from the drying lake-bed. It was then that the main natural bands of territory north of the Equator began to take on their present character[6] of Mediterranean coastlands, north and south Sahara, northern and southern Sahel,[7] northern and southern Sudan, and equatorial forest. The emergence of the modern Sahara hardened existing geographical divisions and separated peoples. The triangle of country between Air, Borku and Lake Chad became almost uninhabitable, with the resultant population shifts perhaps fixing the present divide between the Chadic language group to the west and Teda-Daza to the east.[8] But the Libyan Desert shows signs of existence long before these changes, of being much older than the western Sahara, and thus an ancient barrier to human contact. This was 'an irreducible core of desert whose essential impenetrability has moulded and conditioned the flow and interaction of peoples and cultures during a great part at least of human development in the northern quarter of the continent'.[9]

Drought seems to have forced the black Saharans into the oases or southwards into the more attractive lands of the Sahel, although they may also have been driven from the central desert by the white Libyan Berbers, quite possibly the ancestors of the modern Tuareg. But the ancestors of the black (but not negro) Tebu have been able to hold their own up to the present time in the Tibesti massif and the surrounding piedmont deserts. Movements of Saharan peoples into the oases, into the more fertile lands north and south of the expanding desert, or into the Nile Valley to the east, coincided roughly with the first urban civilisation of Egypt. Thus the Sahara came to mark, as it still does, a certain divide in the African continent. The 'white' northern quarter came to be associated by its separate geography (the 'island of the Maghreb' is an Arabic expression)[10] and by race, culture and religion with the civilisations of the Mediterranean and the Near East. The much larger sub-Saharan 'black' Africa, the most isolated of the three Old World continents, of necessity became remote, introverted and culturally largely self-sustaining.

The Libyan-Berbers who remained in the desert adapted to the deepening aridity by becoming nomads, as the sole economic alternative to settled life. Nomadism is not necessarily a forerunner of settled agriculture, for the reverse may also be the case.[11] Only constant mobility, at least during the summer, and transhumance on a wide scale, ensured grazing for flocks and herds. Such true pastoral nomadism seems to have developed in the Sahara about 3,000 years ago. Grazing thus became the basic economic activity over parts of the desert, and especially on its northern and southern steppe fringes. But nomads still needed to widen their margins of survival in their harsh

environment by trade, war, raiding and the exploitation of settled communities of cultivators in the oases and on the desert edges: 'grazing, war and trade are the three fundamental links in the Saharan economy'.[12] Nomads' patterns of transhumance brought many of them into the settled places for several weeks or even months every year, especially during the date and other harvests of which they claimed a large share, with the visitors dominating, exploiting but also 'protecting' their servile hosts. The oasis-gardens came to be worked by a despised and debased class of black serfs, the so-called *harratin*, possibly intermixed descendants of the Sahara's early black populations.[13]

Rarely have Saharan nomads burst out of their deserts on spectacular wars of conquest. However they have constantly raided other desert tribes or the better-provided but vulnerable settled communities in the oases or beyond the desert, and particularly to the south. Raiders seized animals, whatever poor transportable loot they could find, and above all people to be enslaved and led off into the desert to serve as herders, domestics and sexual partners, or oasis-gardeners.

Trade is likely to have developed through contacts made during nomads' seasonal migrations and predatory visits to oases and desert fringe communities. Regular markets and yearly fairs grew up where different peoples came together. Trading middlemen started by supplying goods and, with their nomadic associates, ancillary services to transhumant tribespeople, oasis-dwellers and settled communities within or on either sides of the desert.[14] They had mainly to meet the simple demands of primitive subsistence economies that themselves produced few goods worth trading over long distances: perhaps the most adventurous business was bartering salt from mid-Saharan workings for millet grown in the saltless southern Sahel. Contacts were also limited by unsuitable transport animals: donkeys and bullocks are not adapted to long desert journeys.[15] The introduction of the Asiatic horse into North Africa shortly after 1000 BC lengthened the reach of desert nomads' raiding and trading.[16] But there is still uncertainty over the scale and scope of their movements before they acquired a transport and riding animal with much greater endurance than any other, the Asiatic camel, about 2,000 years ago. It may be argued that there was no *regular* trans-Saharan trade system before the rise of the camel-mounted Berber nomad in the first Christian centuries and perhaps not even until after the arrival of the first camel-riding Muslim Arabs in North Africa in the seventh century.[17] There is no convincing list of goods that might in antiquity have been *regularly* traded across the Sahara, generating the profits to reward merchants for the time, expense, dangers and hardships of a year-long round trip of 3,000–4,000 miles over appalling country. Gold dust, animal skins, ivory, ingredients for perfume-making, black slaves – the attested staples of the medieval export trade of inner Africa – may have been carried across the desert from time to time in the classical era. Bovill has made a strong case for the trans-desert trade in carbuncle stones as the mainstay of Tripolitania's

Roman prosperity,[18] while Bates has envisaged a 'thin but unending stream of slaves crossing the desert'.[19] Yet there were few blacks, either slave or free, outside Africa in the ancient world. They were anyway largely surplus to requirements in the slave societies of the ancient Mediterranean world already well supplied from many other and nearer sources.[20]

Nevertheless, there are strong arguments for an active trade across the Sahara through the agency of the Garamantes of Fezzan during this period. The Fezzanese oases are strung along a series of depressions with abundant underground water. They lie nearly in the middle of the desert, about one-third of the way down the most direct north–south road from Tripoli to Lake Chad. They are also at about the middle of the long diagonal north-east/south-west route between the lower Nile Valley and the Niger Bend, where West Africa's longest river swings northwards to meet the desert. As a Saharan cross-roads and a natural corridor for travel across the central desert, the Fezzanese oases have always been an essential resting-place, offering fresh supplies, animals, equipment and guides for onward travel, and holding regular markets and fairs on this trading frontier between 'white' and 'black' Africa.

These oases were the homeland of the Garamantes, a Berber people, perhaps a confederation of tribes, first mentioned by the Greek geographer–historian Herodotus in the fifth century BC. He described them as a powerful race, living ten days' travel west of Augila, which puts them in the central Fezzan. According to this brief account (confirmed by ancient Saharan rock art), the Garamantes used four-horse chariots to hunt down fleet-footed 'Ethiopian' cave-dwellers.[21] This is the earliest account of a dominant white race, socially organised and with a relatively advanced technology, exploiting the more primitive Saharan blacks, presumably to enslave them. The 'Ethiopians' Herodotus mentions were probably black but not negro Saharan aborigines, precursors of the modern Tebu.[22] The Garamantes, likely ancestors of the Tuareg confederations of the western and central desert, had presumably been raiding and enslaving the desert blacks long before Herodotus wrote.[23] Most, if not all, such slaves were probably kept by the Garamantes for their own uses and not normally herded up to the coast for export to Mediterranean markets. Here was a tradition of domination and enslavement of one African race by another that was only outlawed, if not wholly suppressed, by the political–social revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[24]

If the Garamantes did not necessarily pioneer some of the main routes deep into Africa, which may well have been much older, they certainly exploited them. They seem in effect to have made them a southern extension of the system of intercontinental trade and communications that emerged with the Mediterranean mercantile empires of the first millennium BC. North Africa west of Egypt perhaps opened its first trans-Mediterranean trading links to southern Europe and the Levant through the agency of the Lebanese Phoenicians. Their search for metals took them first to the central and

western Mediterranean basins some 3,000 years ago; their trading stations in due course reached from northern Tripolitania to the Atlantic coasts of Morocco.[25]

Again, it is not wholly clear what trading opportunities drew the Phoenicians to North Africa in the first place, but they are likely to have sought more attractive and marketable 'luxury' goods than the low-grade local produce, or the slaves, that were anyway more readily available elsewhere in the Mediterranean. But the Phoenicians and their Carthaginian successors were unlikely themselves to have made trading journeys into the Sahara, for the desert itself yielded little of commercial interest, apart from salt and dates, and its middlemen have always closed their business, its secrets and its profits, to outsiders.[26] In the first millennium BC these middlemen are most convincingly identified with the Garamantes of Fezzan. It was through their agency that the Greek colonies planted in Cyrenaica from the seventh century BC onwards opened up limited trade with sub-Saharan Africa, and a similar relationship with the Phoenician–Carthaginian emporia further to the west seems reasonable. The Garamantes are credited with exploiting the so-called Garamantian road, the ancient track from Tripolitania through Fezzan to the lands around Lake Chad. The Cyrenaican Greek colonies were served by the trade road from Augila oasis, which joined the Garamantian trail in Fezzan. But the Garamantes may have had very much wider contacts than these. It has been argued that their business took them from their Fezzanese base far to the south-west, to the goldfields on the headwaters of the Rivers Niger and Senegal; eastwards to the concentration of wealth and population in Pharaonic Egypt; and south-eastwards to the great 'industrial' complex around Meroe on the upper Nile.[27] But other authorities are more cautious, even suggesting that the Garamantes did little desert trade until first century Roman 'pacification' gave them opportunities for Saharan slave-trading.[28]

Like all roads, those in the Sahara varied greatly in length and importance, carrying different types of traffic and serving different communities. While the main roads reached across the full width of the desert, from the Mediterranean coast to the populous lands of the Sudan or, even further, diagonally from Egypt to the Niger Bend, there were few of them. Their northern outlets were partly limited by the meagre choice of harbours on the surprisingly inhospitable Mediterranean coasts, while their southern outlets were dictated by the location of Sudanic population centres, markets, and available trading goods, mostly gold and slaves. Over the past 3,000 years perhaps half a dozen such main roads have been used, with some variations of route. Two or perhaps three such arteries have been active at any one time, with usually only one predominating. But their fortunes have always depended on changing environmental, political, economic, social, security and other conditions within the desert itself or on either side of it. When, as a general rule, only one main and one or two secondary trans-Saharan roads east of the Hoggar massif in the central desert predominated at any one

time, the western routes languished, and vice versa. There have been at least three such changes of fortune over the last 3,000 years, with eastern roads apparently more active in the first millennium BC and again from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and the western roads busier in the Middle Ages.

There was also a network of regional and local roads, distinct from the main trails. This network covered different routes and had different structures and users.[29] For many oases and other isolated communities, these minor roads were important:

> No desert oasis, however lonely and unimportant, was isolated from the lines of trade. To describe the commercial system … in terms of particular routes and specializing groups is certainly to oversimplify it, for caravans, large and small, went everywhere that people lived.[30]

No Saharan route was a road or even a track in any recognised sense, but often merely a general line of travel between two points. Thus the main road from Fezzan to the oasis-chain of Kawar took 'the form of hundreds of entangled paths, in places spreading out over many kilometres, converging at water points, which are the best guide for any traveller, at least when the surface is not sandy.'[31] Such favoured roads were tried and proven over centuries for the relative ease of travel they offered; for their greater security from marauders; for the location of oases with their fresh supplies, guides, transport animals and markets; and for the whereabouts of pastures. But vital to any route was the availability of water at suitable intervals, and enough of it, to meet the urgent, often desperate, thirst of an arriving caravan, possibly of hundreds of people and animals.[32]

Such roads, like any others, had to avoid the difficult places. Small, light caravans of perhaps half a dozen men and twice as many camels might use unfrequented back roads where large, slow slave caravans with their gangs of captive men, women and children might easily meet disaster. Thus large caravans normally avoided such obvious hazards as the great sand seas. These included the Libyan Desert of eastern Cyrenaica, the fearful Tenéré of the south-central desert, and the great *ergs* of the Algerian Sahara: the Great Eastern Erg was 'practically impassable until modern times'.[33] Also to be avoided were the high mountains – the Hoggar, the Tassili N'Ajjer, the Tibesti and others – not only for their difficult travelling conditions, but also because of the predatory hostility of their inhabitants. There were many impassable or dangerous places to be avoided by slow and vulnerable slave caravans, and only a few feasible south–north roads they could use. These tended to occur at regular east–west intervals, about every 700 km. The ancient Garamantian road from the Mediterranean coast of Tripolitania to Lake Chad, although one of the longest trans-Saharan routes, at least offered fair, if dreary, travelling, with wells and oases at regular intervals to meet the voracious needs of northbound slave caravans. This was partly why it was

used as a prime slave road, even through difficult times, for many centuries. The roads from the Niger Bend and the western Sudan to the central and western Maghreb through Taghaza or Tuat to Sijilmasa, Ouargla and Ghadames first came into their own in the early Middle Ages mainly as channels of the gold trade out of West Africa rather than the slave trade, as did the easier, most westerly roads of the Atlantic Sahara with their frequent wells. The harsh but direct slaving road across the eastern Sahara from the Sultanate of Wadai to Benghazi only prospered under exceptional political–religious control in the later nineteenth century, and then only after new and very deep wells had been dug on some of the longest waterless stretches south of the Kufra oases.[34]

The Sahara lies between three main poles of human attraction: the Sudanic lands to the south; the Mediterranean world to the north; and Egypt and the Levant to the east. The open and well-watered Sudanese grasslands are clearly centres of amenity. They are quite narrow, confined between the pre-Saharan steppes to the north and the southern limits to cattle-herding imposed by the tropical forest belt and the tsetse fly. People, trade and ideas have moved easily across all the country that extends, with few natural barriers, from the Nile Valley to the Atlantic coasts of Senegal and Guinea. But it was apparently only in the first millennium AD that outside influences eventually encouraged the emergence of a series of large, populous and powerful Sudanic kingdoms and empires.[35]

The strong commercial and intellectual 'pull' exerted on North Africa by the Mediterranean lands of southern Europe, Egypt and the Levant was still a powerful force even on the far side of the Sahara. Even such a far-off place as the Sudan exercised a reciprocal commercial fascination on North Africa and still had a distinct and even more 'exotic' appeal to the trading societies on the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Before the first Arab invasion of North Africa in the seventh century, the Sahara was a passage only for infrequent trade on a continental, if not an intercontinental scale. The volume of trade was small, and probably made little economic impact on either side of the desert. Apart from gold, inner Africa produced little that was wanted in the Mediterranean world, or was worth carrying there. The trade was probably limited to some species of wild animal for the Roman circuses, carbuncle stones, drugs and raw materials for food-processing and perfume-making: all valuable curiosities once they had crossed the desert.[36] The few black slaves taken from time to time across the Sahara before the coming of the Arabs would no doubt have been seen on the far side of the Mediterranean more as exotic household ornaments than as necessary recruits to the existing and abundant pools of slave labour.[37]

Trade in the reverse, north–south direction was inhibited by the relative poverty, and thus limited purchasing power, of Saharan communities and of Sudanic societies lacking gold or surplus slaves for export. This economic imbalance between the north and the south of the desert was always to put certain constraints on two-way business. But the collapse of Roman and

later Byzantine power on the northern coastlands, with consequent economic and social decline, also no doubt inhibited trade until, in the early Middle Ages, trans-Saharan relationships were regularised and consolidated for the first time. The agents of this change were first of all the newly mobile camel-mounted Berber nomads who were in due course further motivated and inspired by the Islam introduced by North Africa's first wave of Arab invaders. The lasting contacts they made with the emerging black states of the Sudanic Sahel (notably Ancient Ghana) meant that for the first time inner Africa found itself in permanent contact with Mediterranean civilisation. It was at last able to send regular supplies of two very desirable commodities, prime items of exchange, to the new intercontinental Caliphal empire of the Arabs – gold and black slaves.[38] Once established, this trans-Saharan trading relationship, at least in black slaves, was to endure with little interruption for well over 1,000 years, down to the twentieth century.

3 The medieval Saharan slave trade

> What are they made for but to serve us? Go and take them, for they are Kaffirs, and we cannot do without them.
>
> Arab boy, quoted by George Lyon (1820)

By the time Islam came to North Africa, the locals had already lost some of their old fear of the Sahara. To the camel-mounted Berber nomad, warrior or trader, it no longer loomed as the formidable natural barrier it had once seemed. By exploiting the unique advantages of the Asiatic camel, North Africans had by the early Middle Ages mastered long-range desert travel. Islam then completed this revolution by providing the necessary commercial incentives with trade connections on an intercontinental scale. As far as was possible with available means and technology, North Africans perfected a new Saharan caravan trading system, sophisticated for its time, that was to survive with little change until the modern age.[1] Within a century of the first Arab incursions, Berber merchants were bringing a fairly regular supply of black slaves across the central desert to the new Islamic Caliphal empire. These captives came from the largest and seemingly limitless reservoirs of enslaveable peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. For the medieval Islamic World, inner Africa became almost synonymous with, and a legitimate source of slaves.[2] Existing practices of enslavement, slavery and slave-dealing all tended to expand in the Sudan under the stimulus of this external, and seemingly insatiable demand, as they were later to respond in West Africa to the demands of the Atlantic trade. But it is not clear how important slavery and the internal slave trade had been in pre-Islamic Black Africa, or how deep their cultural, and historical roots may have been.[3]

Yet what is clear is that when the Arabs first penetrated the *central* Sahara in the mid-seventh century (perhaps with commercial as well as purely military objectives), surplus slaves were readily available there, first as tribute and later as almost the only local commodity worth trading across the desert. In north-west Africa, by contrast, the first Arabs to thrust deep into the Sahara were drawn by the allure of gold. It was delivered by long and complex means from the far-off goldfields of Bambuk and Boure to the first

of the great Sudanese states, the Empire of Ghana, on the south-west desert fringes. The many medieval Arab accounts of the trans-Saharan gold traffic thus concentrate on the western roads to Morocco and the central Maghreb, and they lay great stress on the golden wealth of Ancient Ghana. According to the early tenth-century geographer Ibn al-Faqih, gold grew there 'in the sand, as carrots do, and is picked at sunrise'.[4] The gift of the West African–Saharan gold trade to the economic wellbeing of the western Maghreb and southern Europe was to catch the imaginations of the great portolan chart-makers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with their remarkable grasp of inner African economic and political geography. Significantly, these chart-makers (the best were Majorcan Jews with the necessary wide-ranging contacts) recorded nothing of the Saharan slave trade, which at the time was merely of secondary importance on the western Saharan roads, and anyway of no economic interest to contemporary Europeans.[5] But from the central and eastern Sudan, where there was little exportable gold, slaves were always the mainstay of the northbound desert traffic to the central and eastern Maghreb (Tunis, Tripoli and Cyrenaica, with its onward overland connections to Egypt).

The first accounts of the Arab penetration of the Sahara to the frontiers of the Sudan confirm that slavery, if not active slave-trading, already existed there. During the early Arab conquest of North Africa in 46AH (666–7AD), Okba bin Nafi occupied Waddan, one of the Giofra oases where the central Saharan road enters Fezzan, and imposed a tribute of 360 slaves on the place. He then went on to the Fezzanese capital, Germa, demanding the same levy. After taking all the Fezzanese settlements, he finally (according to the ninth-century Egyptian historian Ibn Abd-al-Hakam) penetrated as far south as the oases of Kawar, two-thirds of the way to Lake Chad, and again imposed the standard tribute of 360 slaves.[6] This account does not confirm that there was a regular or even an active slave trade in the central desert at that time, either in Saharan peoples or in blacks drawn from further south.[7] But presumably some worthwhile objective had diverted an Arab detachment deep into the Sahara from the main conquest of the North African coastlands.[8] It is possible that in order to meet Arab demands for tribute in slaves (always of the symbolical number of 360), the people of Fezzan and Kawar had to draw on well-established sources of slaves in the central desert (Tibesti and Kawar themselves) and/or from the southern desert fringes (Kanem). It has been argued that once the Arab demand for slaves had been established, initially in the form of specific tribute levied by conquest, it soon evolved into a regular and larger traffic.[9]

The medieval Arab World imagined the Sudan, at its greatest extent, as truly vast, taking years to cross. According to Ibn al-Faqih, who wrote early in the tenth century, the Sudan was half the whole world (12,000 out of 24,000 *farsakhs*, 50,000/100,000 miles).[10] The tenth-century geographer Al-Istakhri was rather more realistic: he estimated the Sudan to be 700 *farsakhs* long and wide (2,500 miles square). He also rightly stressed the Sudan's extreme

remoteness: 'The land of Sudan', he wrote, 'which is the furthest west on the Ocean, is an enclosed land, which has no contact with other kingdoms', being separated from them by deserts[11] taking weeks or months to cross.

At the same time, inner Africa was reputed to be populous. The twelfth-century geographer Al-Idrisi mentions 'the numerous peoples of Sudan – of all peoples, they are the most prolific'[12] – and so they must have seemed, compared with the lightly populated lands of the medieval Maghreb. Arab authors remarked how easily the teeming peoples of the Sudan were snared into slavery: 'blacks are caught with dates' was an old Arab adage.[13] The twelfth-century Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela recorded that Arab slavers used to take wheat, raisins and figs to the Sudan, spread them on the ground near suitable settlements, and then seize and enslave the unsuspecting blacks as they helped themselves to the unaccustomed treat.[14]

In the first instance, not all slaves were made by outsiders. Some were enslaved by their own overlords; by kidnapping; as punishment for crime; individuals might be sold into slavery by their own families in times of distress; others were enslaved by aggressive and stronger neighbours during raids or longer warfare. Al-Yaqubi wrote in the ninth century how 'the kings of Sudan will sell their people without any pretext of war'.[15] As for kidnapping, the anonymous author of *Hudud al-Alam* reported that there were in the Sudan 'people who steal children from each other to sell them to [foreign] merchants when they go there'.[16]

The Sudanese habit of enslaving near-neighbours was still common in the nineteenth century when it was witnessed by early British and other European travellers. Some of them, notably Major Dixon Denham in 1823,[17] accompanied such slaving expeditions. They saw for themselves how villages were raided, the young women and children enslaved, the surplus men who had not escaped massacred, and the old, the lame and the sick killed off or left to die on the roadside.[18] There seems to have been nothing new in such behaviour: in the twelfth century, the geographer Al-Idrisi told how the numerous people of Lamlam in the western Sudan were constantly seized by neighbours 'using various tricks'. Then 'they take them away to their own lands and sell them to the merchants. Every year great numbers are sent [across the Sahara] to Al-Maghreb al-Aqsa [Morocco]'.[19]

As many medieval Arab sources confirm, slave raids were also made during the course of wars, many of them in effect longer-distance and larger raids into the lands of weaker and more vulnerable peoples. Thus the twelfth-century geographer Al-Zuhri tells how Muslims of Ancient Ghana mounted annual, but not always successful, raids into the lands of the pagans whose ebony-wood clubs were no match for the iron weapons of the Ghanaians.[20] Here are set out what were for centuries some of the common slaving practices of inner Africa, with more 'advanced', partly Islamised states, their warriors armed with superior weapons (usually imported across the Sahara), organising regular slave raids against more 'primitive' and vulnerable pagan peoples, mainly (as Al-Zuhri mentions) to supply the trans-desert trade.

Only during the Sudanese dry season, from October to April, were long-distance trading, warfare and slave-raiding possible. Sudanese warfare during those six months or so of fine weather, firm ground and relatively healthy climate often took the character of a Muslim *jihad* against pagan peoples. Besides fulfilling religious obligations, their enslavement was the most 'profitable and humane' way of disposing of such captives: a process of redistribution rather than annihilation.[21] Both Islamic law and economic sense thus in theory constrained the wanton slaughter of potentially useful people. But in practice (and as already mentioned), surplus and potentially troublesome adult males were often culled, while natural causes and casual mistreatment killed off many physically and mentally weaker slaves in the early and most testing stages of their captivity. These were acceptable losses that reflected the sheer superabundance of human resources in the well-populated lands of inner Africa.

Although the Sudanese *Dar al-Islam* had perhaps more the character of archipelagos of Muslim faith amidst seas of persisting animism, there was nevertheless a tendency over time for slave-raiding zones to shift southwards, ever deeper into the open savannahs that run in an unbroken line across Africa, from the Atlantic in the west to the upper Nile Valley in the east, between the southern Saharan Sahel and the tropical rain forest. Thus the medieval Empire of Kanem, as the main supplier of slaves for the Fezzan–Tripoli trade, was itself an entrepot for peoples taken from the non-Muslim lands south of Lake Chad, along the lower reaches of the Shari and Logone rivers. Kanemi raiders in due course also exploited the country south of Baghirmi for slaves as the scope of raiding widened. Around the year 1400 the forces of political power in Kanem–Bornu shifted south-westwards of Lake Chad, reflecting population movements that had been going on for centuries. These changes in turn opened up whole new slaving zones towards the uplands of Adamawa.[22] Baghirmi eventually acquired its own Muslim ruling elite and a popular veneer of Islam, in turn encouraging and justifying slave raids into still pagan country along the upper Shari river. The same processes occurred even later further to the east, in Wadai, which opened up its own slaving fiefs deep in the pagan south, towards the Ubangi–Congo watershed.[23] In the western Sudan, first Ancient Ghana (ninth and tenth centuries) and then the Empires of Mali (fourteenth century) and Songhai (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries) became the sub-Saharan entrepots first of the gold trade and second of the slave trade along the western and west-central desert roads. While the prime sources of gold remained more or less where they had always been, hidden from the outside world along the headwaters of the Rivers Senegal and Niger, the slaving frontier between these superficially Islamised states and the lands of paganism tended to shift southwards, with slaves drawn indiscriminately from many different peoples towards the forest zone. Such was the trend even in the centuries before the growth of the large-scale Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century upset the patterns of slave-raiding and slave-trading throughout western Africa.

Slave-raiding across the Islamic–pagan frontier did not ensure immunity from enslavement for the many residual pockets of paganism well within the boundaries of the Sudanese *Dar al-Islam.* Such enclaves were always more or less vulnerable, but especially so during periods when the most intense religious fervour or revival inspired their Muslim neighbours to *jihad*.[24] There is evidence, on the other hand, that some pagan people were deliberately not converted to Islam simply to maintain their eligibility for enslavement.[25] In some places, there seems to have come a point at which the Islamic frontier would stabilise itself, with the same peoples and tribes beyond the frontier vulnerable to slave-raiding and enslavement for generation after generation. Such seems to have been the fate of the complex of pagan Sara clans settled on the melancholy, seasonally flooded river plains of the Shari and Logone south of Lake Chad. Sara farming and fishing communities were being raided by Kanemi slavers in the Middle Ages; they were still pagan and still being enslaved until the very end of the nineteenth century when some were Christianised and all were given a sense of security by the French colonial regime.[26]

The Muslim World needed to keep importing slaves from across the Sahara and from other sources because, for all the seeming benignity of the system of slavery, its slaves were unusual in their failure to maintain their numbers by reproduction. Many scholars have been puzzled by this state of affairs, which seems to have left the Middle East and most of the Maghreb almost bereft of the living evidence of the historical black slave trades and black slavery that is such a marked feature of modern American and Caribbean societies. Although Ralph Austen has variously estimated that several million blacks were taken as slaves across the Sahara between the seventh and the late nineteenth centuries (one estimate was nearly 9.4 million gross),[27] most of these people seem to have disappeared without trace, apart from pockets of surviving negritude in such places as southern Morocco, the western Sahara and Fezzan.[28] Thus David Brion Davis refers to 'the missing descendants of such an enormous black diaspora'.[29] It is however widely accepted that the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East have apparently not become darker in colour despite their centuries of intimate association with negroes, largely because slaves in the Islamic World failed to reproduce themselves, whereas American black slaves and their descendants have been remarkably prolific. Thus Claude Meillassoux suggests that there is no objective basis in the hypothesis suggesting that female slaves were preferred in Islam because they ensured slave reproduction.[30] According to Patrick Manning, in the 'Orient' (which includes North Africa), as in the African savannah, slave men do not marry, but slave women do. 'The result in the Orient is a tendency for slaves to disappear as a social group biologically through assimilation into the dominant population and socially through manumission of children of free fathers.'[31]

One reason for the constant replacement of the slave population, as suggested by Paul Lovejoy, was the relatively short life-span of many slaves.

Their lives were short because they were moved at a vulnerable age from one disease environment to another; because slaves were often ill-fed and had the worst living conditions; and because of the imbalance between the sexes in slave populations.[32] Given the dearth of information about the medieval Saharan slave trade and its workings, such broad assumptions seem reasonable. So, too, did the statistical suggestions of Ralph Austen.[33] According to his calculations, new slaves had to be brought into the Islamic World at a yearly rate of 15 per cent of the existing pool, merely to maintain any given level of the servile population, although he acknowledges that the figure 'is no more than an educated guess'.[34] It assumes that the 'service life' of a slave (the time between final purchase and manumission or death) was only seven years. As Austen explains, the assumptions on which this figure is based are:

> … a high death rate of slaves during their first years of settlement [in the Arab World] and also during any subsequent epidemics; the manumission of more of the surviving slaves within 10 years of their entry into service; a virtually zero rate of reproduction among slaves … the only substitute for the services of a manumitted or deceased slave was a newly purchased slave.[35]

Elsewhere, Austen points to reports of 'high African susceptibility to Mediterranean diseases' from the Middle Ages onwards.[36] Black slaves were known to be prone to the recurrent outbreaks of plague in the Middle East and North Africa. Slaves were usually imported when they were young, most had no immunity to plague 'and were consequently susceptible to the disease environment of their new surroundings'.[37] The cold, damp North African and Levantine winter also killed off people raised in the tropics. Over half the recorded slave deaths in Tripoli in the 1840s were due to winter 'pulmonary affections', the average age at death being only 25. According to another contemporary statistic, three-quarters of the black slaves shipped from North Africa to the Levant eventually died there of consumption.[38]

It is of course possible that black slaves have contributed more to the physical appearance and genetic composition of modern 'Arab' societies than is supposed, but that this black admixture was 'absorbed and drowned out' by steady white slave imports. These came from western and southern Europe during the early Middle Ages, and later through a massive influx of Slav and Caucasian slaves, shipped across the Ottoman-controlled Black Sea up to the nineteenth century.[39] Such may indeed have been the case in Egypt and other parts of the Arab Mashriq, where white slaves were imported over many centuries. But few white slaves exported as such from Europe were sold in the Maghreb after the high Middle Ages. Instead, Europeans (mostly Greeks and Italians) likely to have influenced local gene pools were the unredeemed Christian captives from ships taken by Barbary corsairs, those seized in raids on nearby European islands and coasts, and

including also those who gained themselves local freedom by turning Muslim.[40] Whatever the case, the fact remains that so long as the Arab World needed black slaves, it had to keep on importing them, from across the Sahara, down the Nile Valley, or by sea from East Africa.

* * *

All the evidence suggests that not Arabs, but Berber merchants of the heretical Ibadi sect, managed the medieval trans-Saharan trade in black slaves, either because they started it in the first place, or because they took over, expanded and regularised an existing but small and random traffic. The Arabs brought the heretical Khawarij sect of Islam from eastern Arabia to North Africa about the year 700. Apart from one important doctrinal peculiarity, it differed from orthodox Sunni Islam mainly over the institution of the Caliphate. It attracted rebellious Berbers as an expression of their persistent revolt against Sunni Arab domination. Under Arab pressure, rebellious, enslaveable Berbers were forced out of the northern coastlands and found refuge in oases on the edges of the northern Sahara. These all became commercial centres, essential entrepots between the deep desert and the settled lands of Mediterranean North Africa. They all had economic ties with each other; they had access to one or more of the big inland or seaport markets of the Maghreb; and each had links to one or more of the leading trans-Saharan roads. From such centres, starting about the mid-eighth century, mobile Ibadi preachers and merchants from Kufa and Basra in southern Iraq infiltrated local Berber tribes. The resultant union of Ibadi business enterprise and Berber familiarity with the Great Sahara and its camel-based transport system, started an economic and commercial revolution. Monopoly of established central and western Saharan roads serving the emerging, lightly Islamised negro states of the western and central Sudan ensured the economic predominance of Ibadi communities from (in modern terms) Tripolitania to Morocco.[41]

Up to at least the eleventh century, Ibadi Berber trade between North Africa and the Sudan was also a successful joint venture with Jewish merchants and financiers. Ibadis controlled the traffic across the desert and into tropical Africa, while the Jews managed and financed the Maghrebi stages of the trade, its extension by sea into southern Europe (notably Islamic Spain) and by sea and overland into Egypt and the Levant – all places where they had the necessary contacts with their own people. Jews were prominent in overland trade across the full width of North Africa, and particularly in the great caravans from Sijilmasa in Morocco, through Kairouan in Tunisia, to Egypt. They may have been active slave-traders along this and other Maghrebi routes, at least up to the ninth century, but apparently not later.[42]

The emergence of a string of Ibadi city-states and schismatic principalities from the Gebel Nefusah of Tripolitania to Sijilmasa, with the Saharan trade providing the economic base for their survival and independence,

transformed once obscure settlements and oases into renowned caravan centres. Jews were drawn to them by the business opportunities and by Ibadi practices of toleration. While there is also evidence that Jewish traders were established in some of the main west Saharan oases and Sudanese markets, in all the mass of material from the Cairo Geniza ('a shambles of fortuitous remnants'), there is no mention at all of Jewish travellers in the Sudan. Indeed, it is unlikely that Jewish merchants went into or across the desert with trading caravans: 'We find ... that shipments [by Jews] when going over a desert route at all were confided to Muslim business friends.'[43] It thus remains a puzzle as to how Jews ever reached some of their remoter destinations inside Africa.

The most easterly Ibadi trade centre was Waddan, one of the settlements forced to pay a tribute of slaves to the first Arab conquerors. It was one of three settlements in the Giofra oasis, an important stage of the Lake Chad–Tripoli road (probably the main Saharan slaving outlet at that time), and marking the northern frontier of Fezzan. The Gebel Nefusah of north-west Tripolitania was also a prime centre of Ibadism (and remained so until the twentieth century). The gebel towns of Giado and Sarus (five days' travel from Tripoli) were Ibadi trade counters with far-reaching interests along the so-called *Triq al-Sudan* (The Sudan Road),[44] joining Tripoli to the oasis of Ghadames. This remote oasis was another Ibadi settlement, an entrepot between Tripolitania and the Niger Bend already with a long history of desert trading. Further west, in the Djerid region of southern Tunisia, and surrounded by magnificent groves of palms producing fine dates, was the town of Tozeur. This Ibadi entrepot was on the south-western road from Tunis, which passed through yet another Ibadi centre, the oasis of Ouargla. In the Middle Ages, Ouargla was the main market of the northern Algerian Sahara, serving Tunis, Constantine, Algiers and other northern cities and, far to the south-west, the Empires of Ancient Ghana, and later Mali and Songhai.[45] The medieval fortunes of Ouargla were closely joined with those of Sijilmasa, the most westerly and the most splendid of the Ibadi trade counters on the northern margins of the Great Desert. Founded in the mid-eighth century to the south-east of the High Atlas Mountains, Sijilmasa soon became the leading North African market (both in size and wealth) of the western Saharan gold trade, and thus an essential component of the economic wellbeing of medieval western Islam. But on the central Saharan roads, roughly those to the east of the Air–Ghat–Ghadames axis, the slave trade was always larger, and indeed all-important. Slaves were almost the only commodity with international exchange value that enabled states around Lake Chad (Kanem and later Bornu) to pay for their North African imports. Most such imports were cheap trade-goods that were regarded as luxuries, and were sold as such, once they had crossed the full width of the Sahara.

By the eighth century there were two small Ibadi states in Fezzan: the Kingdom of Zawila in the east, with the rest of the country ruled by a Muslim successor-state of the former Garamantian entity, which was known to

medieval Arab writers as Fezzan.[46] The small oasis-capital of Zawila came to dominate the slave trade of the central Sahara, eventually giving its name to Fezzan as a whole.[47] Zawila was at the heart of the commercial revolution that made the traffic in black slaves the mainstay of all trade across the central desert for over a thousand years.

In the early decades of their North African conquests, the Arabs had enslaved pagan Berber communities that had never been Judaised or Christianised. But as the Maghreb was Islamised, so this licit and ready source of slaves dried up. At Zawila, Ibadite Berbers transformed this unsustainable Arab demand for Berber slaves into an unfailing supply of pagan blacks from inner Africa to the wider Islamic World. Thus international trade was one aspect of the economic revolution, prompted by the Arab conquests, that had incorporated the declining economy of late Classical North Africa, as well as the cycles of trade between the desert and the savannahs of tropical Africa, into a vast commercial network linking Europe, Asia and Africa.[48] This was something new: for the first time, the Sahara and its trade with inner Africa loomed large in Maghrebi commercial consciousness and calculations.

Berber merchants, and especially those associated with Ghadames and the Gebel Nefusah of north-west Tripolitania, probably already had the necessary slave-trading contacts with Sudan. Combining missionary zeal with their quest for slaves, they opened up the emerging negro states south of the desert to vitalising influences from the Islamic north; thus the blacks' primary Islamisation was 'almost entirely the work of Berber merchants',[49] but they seem to have kept their Ibadi particularisms to themselves. For the first time in history, inner Africa found itself in permanent contact with Mediterranean civilisation.

Besides supplying North Africa and Egypt, Berber slavers also sent some of their blacks to the Arab Mashriq. Access to these Middle Eastern markets came to be closely associated with, and stimulated by, the regular passage of the large pilgrim caravans crossing northern or Saharan Africa to the Holy Places of Islam, for many pilgrims took, or bought, slaves on the journey as a readily realised international 'currency' to be later exchanged as needed.[50]

By the tenth century, Zawila traders were renowned throughout the world of Islam for the number of slaves they brought across the central desert from the Sudan. They were particularly appreciated for their ability to supply eunuchs, most of them drawn from the lands west of Lake Chad. Despite its importance, Zawila was never large.[51] It lies on the northern edge of the last, easternmost reaches to the great Murzuk Sand Sea, with water to support far-spreading date-groves and, at least in the Middle Ages, fields of sorghum and other grains.[52] Besides offering easy access to the main highway between Lake Chad and Tripoli, Zawila's position, rather to the east of the main cluster of Fezzanese settlements, put it much nearer to the thriving slave markets of Egypt and the Levant where demand, and therefore presumably prices and profits, justified the longer overland journeys through Augila and the Western Desert of Egypt than the shorter trek up to Tripoli.

In 918 the Banu Khattab Berber dynasty took control of all Fezzan, with Zawila as capital. Early Arab travellers and geographers considered the place as effectively the frontier-post of the Sudan, the point at which Black Africa began. This was not entirely an exaggeration, since the people and culture of medieval Fezzan still had much of their original Sudanic character. In the earliest-extant description of Zawila, the ninth-century historian, geographer and traveller, Al-Yaqubi, reports it as a thriving market. Slaves were acquired from Muslim Berber merchants at Kawar, 15 days' travel southwards down the Lake Chad road, and they in turn had brought the slaves there from the Sudan, either by raiding or by purchase from other raiders or traders. Slaves were absorbed into the Zawila marketing system from many different and distant parts of Sudanic Africa – from as far to the south-east as the frontiers of Nubia, and in the opposite direction, from well to the south-west of Lake Chad.[53]

Zawila also drew merchants from Khorassan in central Asia, and Basra and Kufa in southern Iraq,[54] confirming that links with some of the original centres of Ibadi protest still continued.[55]

The geographer Al-Istakhri, who wrote in the mid-tenth century, reported that most of the black slaves brought to the Maghreb by the difficult routes across the Sahara 'converged' on Zawila.[56] A century later Al-Biruni placed Zawila 'on the marches of the lands of Sudan, the gateway for imported slaves'.[57] Black slaves were taken into Tunisia at this period as military recruits in particular; probably coming up from the central Sudan through Zawila, they formed an important element in the army of the Zirid state.[58]

Al-Bakri, who has been qualified as 'undoubtedly one of the most important sources for the history of the western Sudan',[59] found Zawila in the eleventh century as:

> … a town without walls and situated in the midst of the desert. It is the first point of the land of Sudan. It has a cathedral mosque, a bath and markets. Caravans meet there from all directions and from there the ways of those setting out radiate … from [Zawila] slaves are exported to Ifriqiya [Tunisia] and other neighbouring regions.[60]

By the time Yaqut wrote his *Mujam al-Buldan (The Dictionary of Countries)*, early in the thirteenth century, Zawila had become known as Zawila al-Sudan, and most of its people were black,[61] a change from earlier times no doubt reflecting the town's long history as a foremost slaving entrepot. Zawila may not have needed defensive walls at the time of Al-Bakri. However when 1154 the most famous of all Arab geographers, Al-Idrisi, completed at the Sicilian–Norman court of King Roger II his great work of geography, *Kitab Rujur (The Book of Roger)*, he reported that the town was still populous but that 'Arabs roam the country causing as much trouble to the people [of Zawila] as they can. All these regions are in the hands of the nomad Arabs.'[62] This remark seems to reflect the spreading

presence of the two great Arab tribes, the Bani Hillal and the Bani Sulaim, that had migrated across North Africa in successive waves from the late tenth century. They caused widespread unrest and civil and economic disruption, resulting in the greater Arabisation of what until then had still been a mainly Berber Maghreb. They were one factor in the assimilation of the Ibadi sect over much of North Africa into orthodox Sunni Islam;[63] another was the rise of the Almoravid reformists in north-west Africa in the eleventh century. By about 1100 Fezzan was coming under increasing pressure from encroaching Bani Sulaim nomads. From these people were descended many of the main Arab tribes (most notably the Awlad Slaiman) that later dominated southern Tripolitania, the Sirtica and Fezzan[64] and thus the northern stages of the Lake Chad–Tripoli route. So long as the Bani Khattab ruled Fezzan, and the Empire of Kanem controlled the road from Lake Chad at least as far as Kawar, nomad predators were merely a pest. But in 1172–73 the Banu Khattab were overthrown by a mamluk adventurer, Sharif al-Din Karakush, trade through Fezzan was disrupted, and Zawila lost for ever its commercial pre-eminence. In the early nineteenth century the British traveller, George Lyon, was still impressed by the 'extraordinary ruins' of medieval Zawila: 'Judging from the ruins I saw, I conceive it must once have been of much consequence, and built in a manner quite superior to the Arab towns in general.'[65]

In the mid-thirteenth century, the widening power of Kanem enabled the ruler to intervene in Fezzan to protect the vital northbound slave trade and to prevent its possible diversion onto other routes. He annexed Fezzan, installing a governor at a new market capital at Traghen, nearly mid-way between Zawila and Murzuk. Kanem's power eventually reached as far north as Zella, on the main road to Augila and Egypt, and Waddan, dominating access to Tripoli from the south-east. Although this was apparently the first instance of any one power simultaneously controlling nearly the full length of the Chad–Tripoli road, there are doubts about the economic and political power Kanem actually wielded in Fezzan. Yet during this period Kanem did open commercial relations with Tunis, and had close diplomatic, religious and trading ties with Egypt. And Kanemi influence on Fezzanese society, on place and official names, and even on building styles and town plans, lasted until the nineteenth century.[66]

Around the beginning of the sixteenth century, Fezzan came under the rule of the Awlad Mohammad dynasty; this maintained a certain precarious independence and stability over the next three centuries from a new capital at Murzuk,[67] which became a new centre of the Saharan slave trade. Like medieval Zawila, Murzuk was not a large place, its size never matching its importance. During all the centuries of its fame and prosperity as the main entrepot of the central Saharan slave trade, it probably never had more than 5,000 inhabitants, not including another 2,000–3,000 in the suburban gardens.[68]

The regular slave trade of the central Sahara was first associated with the

rise, prosperity and predominance of the Empire of Kanem on the Sahel east and north-east of Lake Chad. The record of the lake's levels between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries suggests a wetter climate, more favourable to state-formation in those rather unpromising surroundings.[69] In this typical Sudanese state, with its black pagan peasantry, a formerly foreign and nomadic aristocracy, and a Muslim veneer, domination of peoples was always more important than territorial extent in a region of few natural barriers. Thus, if gold exports were the mainstay of medieval Sudanese societies further to the west, booty, and particularly human booty, was the primary source of Kanemi state income.

Slavery and the slave trade, both sanctioned by recently adopted Islam, were essential to the political and economic wellbeing of the Kanemi state. Slaves were almost the only available and accepted exchange for essential imports from the north. Thus the returns of the slave trade brought the rulers of Kanem the means to pay for the imported weapons and heavier war horses and their equipment[70] with which to conquer and enslave yet more people; they brought the luxuries of Europe and Islam to buy or reward the services of subordinates; and the trade itself was a means of raising revenue.

Kanem was not necessarily a prime source of trade slaves, but a market-place where those drawn from lands deeper in the African interior, along with marketable tropical produce, were bartered for the goods brought by Saharan traders. While most black slaves came from countries beyond Kanem, by the time they had crossed the Sahara, their true origins had been lost or forgotten, and they were simply known by the country from which they had started their desert journey:[71] similarly, what is known as 'Moroccan' leather came largely from the western Sudan. Kanem was also where selected trans-Saharan imports were sent deeper into the continent.

The main outlet to the north, and thus Kanem's link with the wider world of Islam, was the ancient Garamantian road through Kawar and Fezzan. Indeed, this was probably the empire's only reliable desert route, although it is possible that blacks were imported into Tunisia in the tenth and eleventh centuries by crossing the desert along a more westerly road.[72] The use and importance of the various Saharan trade routes may indeed have fluctuated over the centuries in response to changing political, economic and other conditions on either side of the desert, or within the desert itself.[73] But one remarkably constant feature of trade across the Sahara over the past 2,000 years seems to have been the perennial survival and at least regional pre-eminence of the grand highway between Lake Chad and Tripoli, which was closed only at times of acute crisis.[74] No doubt it survived largely because it offered, relatively, the easiest travelling conditions for large slave caravans. By Saharan standards it was well provided with resting places and fairly well-spaced, reliable and abundant wells. But, above all, and when all other factors are taken into account, it survived because this was the central Sahara's shortest and most direct route to the Mediterranean. It served the slave markets of Tunis, Tripoli and, via Augila oasis, those of Egypt and the Levant.

Apart from Fezzan, there was also Ghadames. It was an ancient and active trade counter, a centre of Ibadism, but medieval Arab writers make surprisingly little mention of its commercial importance.[75] In the eleventh century, Al-Bakri called Ghadames 'a charming town abounding in dates and water', dates, he added, being the main food of its Muslim Berber people.[76] But he had nothing to say about its trade. And in the fourteenth century, Al-Harani thought Ghadames only worth noting as 'an important town'.[77] However later in the same century, Ibn Khaldun recognised its prominence on the pilgrim network.[78] There is no suggestion by any of these authors that Ghadames was a leading medieval entrepot of the slave trade. Yet the oasis has always had a unique and important role in trade with Tripoli and Tunis to the north and, in the opposite direction, with more westerly Sudanese markets and regions not served by Fezzan and the Kawar–Lake Chad road. At Ghadames, Sudan-bound caravans had a choice of roads: one south-westwards to In Salah in the Tuat oasis-complex, and so to the Niger Bend; or one nearly due south to Ghat, and thence through Agades (Air) to Hausaland.[79] The medieval gold trade of the western Sudan was clearly important to Ghadames. But its Ibadi merchants in the early Islamic centuries (and possibly also the ancient Jewish communities known still to be there in the twelfth century) were presumably also deeply involved in the Sudanese–Saharan slave trade.[80] Yet it is also true in the nineteenth century (and thus it may have also been true in earlier centuries of slowly evolving Saharan history) that Ghadames was only a secondary market of the central Saharan slave trade, with Fezzan normally predominating.

Because the western Saharan roads were for so long dominated by the gold trade, their traffic in slaves seemed by comparison insignificant in the Middle Ages. Indeed, it has been suggested that the trade in slaves became 'one of the major activities and one of the principal sources of the political and military formations that were situated in the [western] Sahelo-Sudanic zone' only from the fourteenth century.[81] Another factor may have been the increased desertification of the south-western desert fringes that brought more Sahelian farming communities within the range of Saharan slave-raiders.[82]

In terms of the wealth carried along it, probably the leading Saharan road from the eighth to the eleventh century was the trail from Sijilmasa through Tindouf, which in two months' travelling brought southbound merchants to Awdaghost. This rich southern Saharan entrepot was only ten days' journey from Kumbi Salih, the pre-desert capital of Ancient Ghana, and the international market of the West African gold trade where Muslim merchants enjoyed the ideological prestige and protection of their religion. It seems that Awdaghost, at the southern end of the Moroccan road, was an early centre of slavery if not the slave trade itself.

Sijilmasa, with Zawila, was regarded as one of the two 'gates' between the medieval Maghreb and the Sudan. It was founded in the mid-eighth century in a particularly well-favoured and well-watered site on the pre-desert south-

east of the High Atlas, with access over the mountains to the Moroccan heartlands.[83] The way from Sijilmasa to Ancient Ghana was one of the hardest across the Sahara, and this may have restricted its use as a slaving road. According to the thirteenth-century geographer Yaqut bin Abdallah al-Harnawi, merchants travelled this route ' … drinking fetid and lethal water which has none of the qualities of water other than being liquid. … Soon after they first drink it, their constitutions become affected and they fall ill … They reach Ghana after enormous exertions.'[84] But, as Ibn Fadl-Allah al-Umari recognised a century later, merchants were persuaded to face the road's dangers 'only by the great profits which they make out of the Sudan, for they set out with valueless articles and return with bullion as their camels' burden'.[85] Among these 'valueless articles' was Saharan salt, which always realised a high exchange in the largely saltless Sudan, whether in gold, slaves or other transportable merchandise.

Sijilmasa was still well placed to continue dominating other roads to the western Sudan after the 'fall' of Ghana in the eleventh century and the later rise of Mali on the upper Niger. The eleventh-century Muslim geographer Al-Bakri described the contemporary network of Saharan roads in some detail,[86] and the great Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta used some of them on his journey from Morocco to Mali and back in the mid-fourteenth century.[87] But, unlike medieval Arab accounts of Zawila, these and other descriptions of Sijilmasa and the western roads make little mention of the slave trade. In the tenth century, Ibn Hawkal noted that 'very comely slave girls' and other slaves imported from the land of Sudan, as well as white Slavs brought all the way through Spain, were sent on from the Maghreb to the east – whether by land or by sea, he does not specify.[88] And Ibn Battuta, on his return journey from Mali to Fez in the winter of 1353–54, travelled with a caravan taking 600 black slave girls to Morocco.[89] But, again, it is not clear whether this was a special delivery (a gift or tribute, perhaps, given the lateness of the travelling season), or part of the regular Saharan trade. Similarly, when the great Emperor of Mali, Mansa Musa, crossed the desert through Walata and Tuat to Cairo on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, he was accompanied by an entourage that included 500 slaves. As was common practice on pilgrimage, the emperor no doubt intended to sell some of these en route to help defray the expenses of the journey, although he also carried so much gold bullion with him that Egyptian financial markets took years to recover from his visit.[90] Such expeditions were unique, although a caravan of 500 slaves was quite within the scope of the regular trans-Saharan trade.

None of the west Saharan roads was as permanently predominant as the mainstay of the central Saharan system, the ancient trail from Lake Chad to Tripoli. This may partly be explained by the relatively greater instability of trading states in the western Sudan than in the east. While Ancient Ghana and the Empires of Mali and Songhai succeeded one another at intervals of two to three centuries, there was more political stability around Lake Chad, where Kanem first dominated from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries,

and then its successor, Bornu, from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth. The relative transience of west Sudanic states, and especially the tendency for imperial power to move eastwards, meant that trans-Saharan trade and communications also tended to migrate over the centuries from the western-most to more easterly roads. This movement also reflected shifts in political and economic power in the Maghreb, with the rise in the fourteenth century of the Zayyanide state in western Algeria and the Hafsid state in Tunisia, as the Songhai Empire was forming on the Niger. The outcome was a distinct transfer of trans-Saharan traffic away from the Moroccan termini to Tlemcen (western Algeria), more business for the Tuat oasis-complex, and the slow decline of Sijilmasa, although it still sent a big caravan to Sudan every winter.[91]

Over the centuries, Morocco itself was probably the largest single market in North Africa for imported Sudanese slaves, in the sense that more of them found final buyers there and fewer were re-exported to other markets. The existence of a slave trade between the Sudan and southern Morocco was attested by the Spanish Muslim (later Christian) travelling diplomat, Leo Africanus, in the early sixteenth century when he found that in the district of Sijilmasa (the town itself had already been destroyed), 'some of their principall men are exceeding rich, and use great traffique into the land of the Negros: whither they transport wares of Barbarie, exchanging the same for gold and slaves'.[92] Many slaves were also delivered to Morocco as tribute or gifts to rulers of that important political entity.

* * *

Clearly, the medieval Sahara was anything but an impassable barrier between North and Sudanic Africa. Because of the length, difficulties and dangers of Saharan travel, and the limited load capacity of even the largest caravan (not least because it was normal practice for every third camel to carry food and water for the journey), only the most profitable trade-goods could bear the high costs of the desert crossing. All merchandise had to have a high value in relation to weight, and if freight charges added between 100 and 150 per cent to the price of most items, charges were lower for goods with higher value:weight ratios.[93] This, then, was essentially a trade in luxuries. As one such luxury, most slaves, including even the little children, provided their own transport because they trekked across the desert, sometimes carrying loads of up to 15 kg on their heads to save camel transport: ten loaded slaves might carry as much as one loaded camel.[94] But slaves also had to be guarded and fed, taxes paid on them, and allowance made for deaths from many different causes on the road.

Gold and gold dust were eminently transportable and negotiable. In the mid-nineteenth century, the anti-slavery traveller James Richardson noted that 'gold is brought by merchants in diminutive, roughly-made rings, which they often carry in dirty little bags, concealed in the breasts of their gowns'.[95] Gold became increasingly important to the Maghreb and Europe in the

Middle Ages.[96] Inner Africa had little other than gold and slaves to trade on the intercontinental markets of the Middle Ages and later: ostrich feathers (in demand from the twelfth century onwards), ivory and miscellaneous tropical products such as kola nuts (a mild narcotic acceptable in Islam) and the materials for perfume-making, especially civet musk.[97] Civet cats and their musk were so valuable, even in the Sudan, that George Lyon reported that 'a savage old cat will produce ten or twelve dollars'-worth in three heats. The price is enormous, some [cats] being sold for three or four slaves.'[98] But all these goods – unprocessed raw materials that had become exotic luxuries when they reached the Maghreb – although well able to withstand the harsh climate, the dust and the rough handling of Saharan travel, were essentially secondary make-weights to the prime trade in slaves and gold.

Apart from the difficulties of the Saharan crossing, southbound trade was rather limited by the meagre purchasing power in Sudan, and especially in areas with no ready access to gold or slaves. Nevertheless, southwards across the desert went the Saharan salt essential to an otherwise saltless Sudanese diet,[99] and the manufactures of Europe, North Africa and the Levant, re-exported from the Maghreb. First among these trade-goods were the coarse textiles (especially the short pieces of red cloth mentioned by Al-Bakri as the currency of the slave-traders); copper for minting; arms and armour; glass and beads (for which there was an insatiable Sudanese demand); miscellaneous fancy goods; and horse-riding tackle. Then there were the horses themselves: the heavy mounts, probably derived from the Barb breed of North Africa, and better suited to cavalry warfare on the flat, open country of Sudan than the puny local breeds.

The military potential of horses is fully realised only when they are fitted with the saddles and stirrups that greatly increase the rider's stability, especially when wielding weapons.[100] The ruler of Kanem is said to have had between 30,000 and 40,000 horses by the thirteenth century, which, if not all Barbary imports, were clearly descended from them, and had become a means of state formation and expansion. From the fourteenth century on, Sudanese cavalrymen (or at least the chiefs) were beginning to carry imported European arms (notably cross-hilted swords) and to wear chain mail.[101] This imported Iron Age technology of heavy cavalry 'made possible the raiding and enslavement of those not so provided'. And slaves taken in those raids and exported across the desert in turn paid for further imports of horses and arms.[102]

Leo Africanus, the travelling diplomat of the early sixteenth century, described how in Bornu:

> This king, having encouraged Barbary merchants to take horses there to trade for slaves, at the rate of fifteen or twenty slaves for each horse, was in this way equipped to raid his enemies. The merchants were thus obliged to await the raiders' return, which meant a delay [of] at least two or three months. In this time they lived at the king's expense. When he

> returned from the raid he would sometimes have enough slaves to settle up with the merchants; but at other times they might have to wait a further year, if there were not sufficient slaves to pay them off, for these raids are dangerous and can only be made once a year. When I was in that kingdom, I met many despairing merchants there who only wanted to have done with the business for good, having been a whole year awaiting payment.[103]

This is a recurring reported feature of the Saharan slave trade, with sellers or buyers refusing to do business other than in slaves, and thereby in the nineteenth century frustrating attempts to replace the slave trade with 'legitimate' commerce.

Moving slaves from their place of capture to final buyers was a long, hazardous and complex process. The several transitions from victim of war, raiding, kidnapping, punishment or sale deep in tropical Africa, to trade slave, and finally to domestic ornament in a Mediterranean Muslim household were usually spread over many months. Even after being force-marched out of the Sudan and crossing the Sahara to the Maghreb, some slaves were moved still further on, perhaps across the Western Desert to Egypt, or shipped across the Mediterranean to other parts of the Arab World or, from the sixteenth century, to provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Aegean or Anatolia. Their survival of this coerced and mostly brutal migration, and the often deadly conditions of the slave-marshalling centres and markets,[104] was a matter of gender, youth, sound mind and constitution, and good fortune.

Unless they were very exceptional individuals, or a valuable consignment carefully escorted as a gift or tribute to some potentate in North Africa or the Middle East, slaves crossed the desert on foot as part of the merchandise of camel caravans. In the Sahara, this means of commercial transport may have been elaborated in the early Islamic centuries, but was barely developed thereafter. Compared with other pre-industrial means of transport, and especially with ocean navigation, the Saharan caravan was slow, expensive and inefficient. Although Ibn Khaldun in the late fourteenth century mentioned annual caravans of 12,000 camels crossing the desert to Mali,[105] – and larger caravans were usually safer from marauders – caravan size was normally limited both by availability of camels and by water supplies at some wells. Humans need an absolute minimum of one litre of water/day for passive Saharan survival; but they really need at least three litres daily to ensure physical and mental wellbeing.[106] Even if the camel needs water only every four or five days in summer (half his winter endurance), he may take in up to 40 litres in one fill when he does drink. Such figures, multiplied by hundreds of men and animals, can severely test the yield of even an abundant Saharan well.[107]

Caravans were slow and precarious: at an average of 2.5 mph they could not cover much more than 20 miles in an eight-hour daily journey, even

under fair conditions. Each animal had to be loaded and unloaded at least once daily, and sometimes twice. Depending on travelling conditions and breed, a camel carried 120–150 kg but, because many journeys were long (up to two months between some main supply centres) about one-third of baggage animals in any caravan simply carried supplies for the journey. And even camels have their limitations in the Sahara: in July and August, when daytime temperatures may reach 50°C, they suffer from the heat, and travel best in the cool of the night.[108] If slaves were expected to make the full Saharan crossing on foot, baggage camels rarely did so, not least because they needed to recuperate for months after a long desert journey; as a rule, four months' exertion would earn them eight months' rest.

Any caravan was an ephemeral entity, formed on an *ad hoc* basis by a group of travellers, merchants and others, in response to seasonal trading opportunities, and likely to change in size and composition at different stages on its route. The timing of any caravan depended on the availability on both sides of the desert of goods to trade and likely demand for them, either within the desert itself or on its fringes. But the first consideration was always climatic: because the desert crossing took two or three months (or even longer under certain conditions), travellers from the Maghreb normally expected to make one round trip a year at the most, spending the 'winter' (or dry season) in the Sudan. Since it was often the case that not enough camels for long-distance desert travel were available in the north, particularly in the spring, southbound caravans tried to set out in September or October. On the far side of the desert, the Sudanese warring and slaving season promised plenty of cheap slaves in the southern markets early in the year. Prudently organised slave caravans returned across the Sahara between March and June to avoid the greatest summer heats and the frigid winter nights, both fatal to many of the naked, over-driven and ill-fed trade slaves. Thus most slave caravans arrived at Moroccan markets or at Tripoli and other Mediterranean export outlets in the April–June quarter, well-timed to take advantage of the summer sailing season for cargoes of black slaves due for shipment and yet another sale at markets up and down the Mediterranean.

Trans-Saharan trade was divided into several distinct and separate sections. Caravans usually plied between the northern termini (Marrakesh, Fez, Tunis, Tripoli and later Benghazi) and assembly points at the edge of, or well into, the desert (Sijilmasa, Ouargla, Ghadames Murzuk, Augila) where caravans to and from the coast normally broke up and dispersed. At these centres, where provisions and travel equipment could be had, and fresh guards, guides and camels hired, new caravans gradually formed up for the main desert crossing.[109] This was a process that could take weeks, months or occasionally even years, as frustrated nineteenth-century European travellers often found to their cost.[110]

Along the main desert routes there were halting places – Teghaza, In Salah in Tuat, Ghat, Agades, and Bilma in Kawar, among others, where food and fresh camels might be had. These were not necessarily termini in

their own right, although some drew buyers and sellers from all over northern Africa to yearly markets, such as those at Murzuk and Ghat in the winter and at various venues in southern Morocco in the late summer. Some lasted for weeks or even months, not necessarily because there were so many slaves and other goods to sell, but because bargains took so long to strike, barter being more common than cash.[111] Finally, there were the great southern entrepots of the desert trade – Timbuctu and Gao, where the Niger Bend reaches north to the very edge of the Sahara; Kano and Sokoto for Hausaland; and Kukawa and earlier market-capitals for Kanem and Bornu. As already mentioned, these were places of exchange and onward shipment between the Sahara, the Sudan and lands deeper into the African interior.[112]

Although trans-Saharan trade in general and the slave trade in particular were clearly specialised and hazardous, calling for prudence, foresight, organisation and experience, it is still not clear who were the merchants, agents and financiers who kept them going for many centuries. The Ibadi Berbers of the early Islamic era were later joined, or replaced, by traders from other ethnic or religious groups, including Maghrebi Jews, Muslim Arabs, Sudanese Muslims and European Jews and Christians. Trading middlemen kept outsiders away from the traffic itself: European Christians were never allowed to travel into the interior from their trade counters in the Maghrebi Mediterranean ports (with the possible exception of the Genoese, Antonio Malfante, who apparently reached Tuat in the mid-fifteenth century).[113] According to Leo Africanus in the early sixteenth century, Maghrebi Muslim entrepreneurs engaged in various restrictive practices, including barring fellow-merchants from the desert roads and their secrets.[114] But, as always, traders with the right connections could travel and settle anywhere. Those of Ghadames, for instance, established themselves in Timbuctu and other Sudanese emporia from the Middle Ages onwards, controlling a large part of the import–export trade between Sudan and North Africa up to the end of the nineteenth century.

The actual large-scale international trade across the Sahara (as opposed to often far-ranging trading by individuals or small groups, especially Tebu) was at the mercy of whichever peoples, tribes or confederations of tribes – Tuareg, Tebu, Moor or Arab – that happened to control a particular route. Above all, nomads hired out or sold most of the necessary camels for the journey, and provided some of the camel-drivers and guides. Caravans thus not only had to pay dues to the recognised authorities as they left the Maghreb and as they arrived in Sudan, but they also had to buy immunity from attack by suitable payments to tribal groups along the road.

The Saharan caravan trade was never a single, coherent business or transport operation, not even along any of the main and long-established slaving routes, such as those between the Niger Bend and Morocco, or from Lake Chad to Tripoli. It was always unpredictable, fragmented and spasmodic, and over the centuries it remained undeveloped and inherently inefficient. Traders seem usually to have worked under severe handicaps:

apart from some striking instances of inter-family cooperation between some Maghrebi, Saharan and Sudanese business centres, there were no effective or enduring trade organisations or companies of merchant venturers, no large-scale enterprise, no long-term business or financial strategy, no attempt to break the stranglehold of the nomads over the whole Saharan transport system, with its utter reliance on relatively few camels, which was perhaps the greatest of its perennial difficulties. For the camel, as the main fixed capital asset of the system, and the desert, as the only route the trade could take, remained in the hands of Saharan peoples who looked after their own interests, regardless of wider trading concerns or opportunities. And because the caravan system was itself so inefficient, in particular allowing only one round desert journey a year, traders wasted many inactive months in Sudan on every trip.[115]

Even in the nineteenth century, the organisation of Saharan trade seems to have been no more effective than it had been when, as a then sophisticated new enterprise, it had come into being in the early Middle Ages. It was still a question of merchants joining in a loose, temporary association to make up as caravan almost on an *ad hoc* basis, each arranging his own finance and credit, each bringing his own merchandise, stores, equipment and hired or bought camels, and each dealing in a few slaves and in small quantities of goods on his own account, or perhaps on behalf of one or two others at the most. Francois Renault has aptly summarised such arrangements as self-financing with collective organisation.[116]

With all its risks and difficulties, Saharan trade had to be highly profitable. In the mid-nineteenth century the French explorer Henri Duveyrier reported, 'All Saharans hold it as a self-evident truth that a fortune can be made simply by undertaking a journey to Sudan'.[117] Prices paid for slaves, and indeed for all goods in the Saharan trade, are rare and confusing before the nineteenth century.[118] Figures from around 1850 (see Chapter 6) suggest that *gross* profits of around 200 per cent could be made on the trade in young slave boys and girls between the Hausa States (northern Nigeria) and the mid-Saharan slave market at Murzuk, with further profits on sales at yet more distant markets. In all these places, *prices* for slaves varied widely according to age, sex, skills, origins (to some extent) and the laws of supply and demand. In the tenth century, Al-Istakhri reported that 'an unskilled slave girl or man will fetch, according to his or her appearance, 1,000 *dinars* or more'.[119] From his context, it is unclear whether this was the price of 'black slaves from the land of Sudan' or 'white slaves from Al-Andalus' (Spain). Either way, it seems to have been excessive, equal to nearly 5 kg of gold for one slave. In the eleventh century, Al-Bakri mentioned that at Awdaghost, on the northern fringes of the western Sudan, good Sudanese women cooks were being sold for at least 200 *dinars;* three centuries later, Ibn Battuta bought an 'educated slave girl' in Sudan for 25 *dinars.* The evidence of other late medieval Arab and European witnesses suggests that prices ranged from 5–10 *ducats*[120] for an unskilled but well-built male slave; double for

eunuchs and beautiful slave girls; and even higher prices for girls of exceptional appearance or accomplishments. Conversely, physical and moral defects in slaves could lower their value or, if undeclared, result in their return to the seller within three days of purchase. Such defects included epilepsy, leprosy, flat feet, insomnia, anorexia, dissolute habits, and a tendency to alcoholism or absconding.[121]

In the Sudan, slaves were traded for imported horses over many centuries, with one horse always worth many slaves. As already noted, Leo Africanus in the early sixteenth century was the first visitor to give a specific, first-hand account of this trade in the central Sudan (Bornu), stating that imported Barbary horses were exchanged at the rate of 15–20 slaves each. The Venetian merchant Alvise Ca' da Mosto had found over 50 years earlier that he could sell European horses on the coast of Senegambia for 'from nine to fourteen heads of negro slaves, according to the quality and beauty of the horses'.[122] This rate of exchange lasted until at least the early nineteenth century, when George Lyon heard of horses imported through Fezzan being given for slaves from Bornu, with one fine horse fetching between 10, 15 or even 20 negresses.[123]

By modern standards, all medieval trade was on a petty scale. The northbound Saharan traffic, essentially a limited exchange of merchandise that became luxuries after bearing the costs of the desert transit, may have seemed a rich and exotic commerce by the far meaner standards of past times: the name of Timbuctu still has a certain resonance earned centuries ago but no longer deserved. Taking all the Saharan roads together, such goods were delivered in quantities – at most a few hundred tons/year – that were by the high Middle Ages hardly on the same scale as the many considerable cargoes then being shipped in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and other seaborne trades.[124] Even the trade in black slaves at the core of the Saharan system was a fairly modest transfer of people, probably rarely delivering more than 5,000 slaves/year along all the Saharan roads.

Numbers of slaves taken into the Sahara, or right across it to the greater Islamic World, can never be fully known, for there are no consistent records before the 1840s. Recent estimates of the traffic over past ages are partly based on back-calculations from the observations and figures from that statistically minded nineteenth century. In his monumental *Tableau géographique de l'Ouest Africain au moyen age*, Raymond Mauny estimated that in its first 900 years (seventh–fifteenth centuries), the Islamic Saharan trade delivered nearly 6 million live black slaves to the far side of the desert. According to his calculations, the trade started at a modest average rate of 1,000 slaves/year in the seventh century, doubled in the next century and again in the ninth, reached 5,000 slaves/year in thirteenth century, doubled to 10,000/year in the fourteenth century, and doubled again to 20,000/year in the fifteenth. The trade continued at that average yearly rate, Mauny believed, until the twentieth century; however he later revised his figures upwards[125] (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Some estimates of medieval Saharan slave transits: Average yearly numbers

Century	*Mauny*[a]	*Austen*[b]	*Wright*
600–699	1,000	(650–) 1,000	500
700–799	2,000	1,000	2,000
800–899	4,000	3,000	4,000
900–999	5,000	8,700	5,000
1000–1099	5,000	8,700	3,500
1100–1199	5,000	5,500	4,500
1200–1299	5,000	5,500	5,000
1300–1399	10,000	5,500	5,000
1400–1499	20,000	4,300	5,000
Annual average	6,333	4,800	3, 833
Totals	5,700,000	4,320,000	3,450,000
5% Desert edge retention:		216,000	
20% Deaths in transit:		864,000	
Total Saharan departures:		5,400,000	

Notes
a R.Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique noire*, pp. 240–1.
b R.A. Austen, 'The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census' in Gemery and Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market*, p. 66.

Mauny's figures now seem far too high, and he made no separate allowance for the sale of slaves in transit to buyers within the Sahara itself, both nomads and oasis-dwellers; nor did he take into account deaths of slaves from many different causes on the road. Ralph Austen, by contrast, makes more modest suggestions about the size of the medieval trade, proposing that it reached a peak average of 8,700 slaves/year during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, falling back to 5,500 yearly over the following 300 years. He also makes due allowance for the sale of slaves in transit ('desert edge retention' – 5 per cent) and deaths on the road (20 per cent).[126] Overall, Austen suggests that about 4.3 million slaves were brought across the desert during the nine centuries under review. It is not possible for such figures to reflect all the vicissitudes of medieval Maghrebi, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern history. Yet such events as the Bani Hillal and Bani Sulaim invasions of North Africa, the Almoravid *jihad* in the western Maghreb and Spain, the Norman intrusion into the central Mediterranean (including the occupation of Tripoli), the Crusades, the Mongol invasion of the Middle East, and the Eurasian Black Death may each in its own way have influenced the flow of trade slaves across the Sahara, stimulating, or more often inhibiting, demand for them in the distant markets of an increasingly troubled Islamic World. Since the size of the traffic from year to year was probably determined partly by the availability of suitable captives in the Sudan, but even more so by merchants' expectations of demand on the far side of the Sahara, such cosmic

events must have had some repercussions on the short- and long-term fortunes of the trade.

Given its inherently conservative and inflexible character, and the many practical limits to its growth, the Saharan slave trade may not have fluctuated as strongly over the centuries as some modern authorities have suggested. From a slow start under the stimulus of a growing, intercontinental Islamic demand in the late seventh century, the *regular* transit of slaves along all the Saharan roads may have risen to a peak of 5,000 slaves/year in the tenth century, falling off in response to more difficult marketing conditions over the next 200 years (particularly in northern Africa) and then recovering to reach its natural plateau of 5,000 slaves/year during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While sudden increases in the size of the trade from one century to the next were unlikely, it is also doubtful that the system could really cope with as many as 20,000 slaves/year for many consecutive centuries during and after the late Middle Ages, as Raymond Mauny has suggested (see Table 3.1).

This, then, was a particular business system that came into being as a fixed, annual enterprise in response to specific conditions, stimuli and demands in the early Islamic era. So it continued to work and prosper in much the same unhurried and unchanging ways for well over a thousand years. Yet it managed to take some early advantage from the first big challenge to its well-guarded monopolies. That challenge came in the fifteenth century from pioneering Portuguese navigators in West Africa, and their first landfalls in search of slaves on the long, desolate Atlantic coasts of the Western (ex-Spanish) Sahara.

4 The land ways and the sea ways

> [The King of Senegal] supports himself by ordering the kidnapping of many slaves both from his own country and from those of his neighbours. He uses these slaves in many different ways, but above all to cultivate various land-holdings made over to him. Moreover, he sells many of them to the Sanhaja Berber and Arab merchants who turn up there with horses and other goods; and he has also begun to sell them to the Christians since they started transacting business in those lands.
>
> Alvise Cadamosto, 1455–56

Historically, the ruthless environment of the Sahara has been a closed, almost private world. Its people always saw outsiders as hostile, and especially those trying to uncover, join in or profit from the trade secrets of the Great Desert. This exclusive jealousy seems to have been as true of the Garamantes of the Classical Age as it later was of Muslim merchants and middlemen. If interlopers could not break down this hostility, some eventually simply ignored it and, by opening up the Atlantic Ocean routes to West Africa at the end of the Middle Ages, outflanked and by-passed the Muslim-controlled overland trading and communications networks. Those first to combine the necessary enterprise and boldness, royal financial support, and technical and navigational skills, were the Portuguese, aided and encouraged by the Genoese. Restricted in its territory by aggressive Spanish neighbours, Portugal made the Atlantic Ocean its opening to the wider world, to hopes of wealth and power. Joint Portuguese-Genoese enterprise rediscovered the Canary Islands (known to the Romans but later forgotten) in the early fourteenth century, followed around 1350 with the finding of uninhabited Madeira and the Azores, far out in the western ocean.[1] But the real goal was the nearest infidel land, the African continent, offering souls to be saved and all the adventures and fortune the Portuguese craved, where the old Muslim enemy could be harried and enslaved, and where there were hopes of trade with pagan Africans beyond the reach of Muslim middlemen. The fame of small, remote Portugal in Europe and in Christendom would surely be enlarged by such a crusade, and especially if the fabled, long-sought Christian ruler, Prester John, were to be traced to inner Africa and recruited to the common anti-Islamic cause.[2]

But of all Africa's many prizes, the most glittering and urgent was its gold. Even in Classical antiquity, West Africa was a known source of the gold dust and bullion that later drew medieval Muslim traders first to Ancient Ghana, and then to the Empires of Mali and Songhai. Although the origins of the ore were unknown, dust and bullion exported across the Sahara enriched the medieval western Maghreb and, shipped across the Mediterranean, primed the economic growth of southern Europe.

Europeans began to learn more about this vital trade in the thirteenth century through translations of Arab geographers' descriptions, and from Majorcan Jews. Some of the relevant information appeared on the portolan charts drawn in Majorca and Italy from the early fourteenth century. Thus the planisphere of Giovanni di Carignano, compiled about 1320, represented the gold as originating in the great river 'Nile' (the Niger) of West Africa. The celebrated *Catalan Atlas* of the Majorcan Jew Abraham Cresques (1375) showed that the gold was sent across the Sahara from the Empire of Mali to Sijilmasa where it was dispersed throughout the western Maghreb and into southern Europe. Africa's golden wealth had been strikingly confirmed 50 years earlier by the gold-strewn pilgrimage through North Africa to Mecca of the Emperor Mansa Musa of Mali.[3]

Thus, as Maghrebi and Sudanese Islam seemed to bar Christian Europe's direct access to an immense source of golden riches in West Africa, the untried ocean paths apparently offered another and easier approach. The Muslims knew the Atlantic as 'The Green Sea of Darkness', believing it to be unnavigable beyond the familiar coastal waters of Morocco. Cape Bojador, on the mainland some 250 km south of Las Palmas in the Canaries, was long the limit of Portuguese navigation. To sail beyond the cape was easy, for prevailing winds and currents were favourable: the difficulty was the return northwards.[4] Urged on by Prince Henry 'The Navigator', in 1434 Gil Eanes at last rounded the cape, which had been as much a psychological as a navigational obstacle. Within ten years, Cape Verde, south of the River Senegal, had been found, and in 1455 the Venetian merchant venturer, Alvise Cadamosto, with Antoniotto Usodimare, a Genoese sailing under Portuguese sponsorship, reached the Guinea mainland south of the River Gambia and explored the Bissagos Islands. The following year Cadamosto reached the Cape Verde Islands.

While there was little gold to reward Portuguese efforts, slaves of various races were made and exploited. Indeed, they were the only marketable commodity found on all the long, desolate coasts where the Sahara meets the Atlantic. The first captives had been hunted down there in 1441. Taken to Portugal, those few Sanhaja Berber tribespeople were souls to be saved, and also the first tangible profit from the costs and trials of exploration. In 1444 raids on wretched Saharan coastal communities yielded a total of 235 slaves, some described on arrival in Lisbon as 'white', others as 'mulattos' and others again as 'black as Ethiopians'.[5] This suggests that the consignment included not only Saharan Berbers but also some of their own black slaves

raided or traded from across the Senegal.[6] There were more slave-raiding voyages in the mid-1440s. But the poor, sparse, fishing, hunting and herding communities of the western Sahara were becoming wary of raiders from the sea, and were anyway unpromising slave material: in the opinion of the Venetian Cadamosto they were dark, small, thin, poorly developed people.[7] The negroes met beyond the Senegal were much more robust, and they fought fiercely to avoid capture, although the Saharan Berbers seemed able to enslave them by ruse rather than by force.

Enslavement was then still normal European practice, especially during the ongoing *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. But the institution of slavery as such had declined over much of the continent during the Middle Ages, largely for economic and social reasons. The Portuguese needed slaves as domestic and agricultural labour, some at home, but above all on the new, sugar-producing Atlantic island possessions. It was soon apparent that both slaves and gold might be had more easily in western Africa by exchanging European trade-goods for them through existing markets. The first such business was done from the Portuguese base at Arguin Island, just below Cabo Branco, in 1446. Within two years about one thousand trade slaves had been shipped off to Portugal or the Atlantic islands.[8]

Here, then, were the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade (although it still lacked the *trans*-Atlantic, American dimension), with European shippers bartering trade-goods for human cargoes delivered to the coast by local middlemen with the necessary connections with the inland sources of marketable captives. Also for the first time, the trade in black slaves from the western Sudan northwards into the western Sahara and the distant Maghreb had an alternative outlet. European traders on the coast were now offering some of the highly desirable products of their continent (most of it in reality cheap rubbish) for common trade slaves easily diverted from the regular desert slaving routes. This new business might well have been more appealing to local middlemen than the troublesome, time-consuming alternative of hawking their slaves around Saharan encampments and oases, or delivering them in marketable condition to the trade fairs and slave markets of the western Maghreb, on the far side of the Great Desert.

An early, intelligent and unprejudiced observer of the primitive Atlantic slave trade out of the western Sahara and the Guinea[9] coast was the Venetian Alvise Cadamosto. His lively account of his two voyages of trade and exploration to western Africa and some of its offshore islands in 1455 and 1456 was published a century later by the celebrated Venetian bookman, Giovanni Battista Ramusio, in the first of the six volumes of *Navigazioni e Viaggi*.[10] By the time Cadamosto visited the western Sahara, the Portuguese were regularly shipping 700–800 slaves/year through their fortified enclave at Arguin Island, the first of many such trading 'factories' in Africa. They acquired slaves from Moorish dealers who had swapped them in Sudan for silks from Tunis and Muslim Granada, some silverware, and 'many other things'. But the best business was done in Barbary horses, much prized in the

Sudan, where the local breeds were small and puny. Normally, horses that survived the desert crossing, or the sea voyage on Portuguese ships, could be exchanged locally for 10 or 15 slaves. The entrepot of this three-way western Saharan trade was Waddan, which Cadamosto located only six days' travel inland from Arguin.[11] At Waddan, northbound caravans split up, he reported, some merchants taking consignments of gold north-east to Cyrenaica, where it found its way to Sicily; a second group made for Tunis and other North African markets; while a third travelled westwards to do business with the Portuguese on the coast.[12]

South of the River Senegal, in Guinea itself, Cadamosto learned that the native blacks were convinced that Europeans only wanted slaves to eat. He saw that in Senegambia there was already some competition between the old Saharan and the new Atlantic slave trades. He also found that the people, better-built and more robust than the stunted, half-starved Saharans, feared and mistrusted their rulers who 'for every slight failing would seize their wives and children to sell them' as slaves.[13] He had a promise of slaves for the seven Spanish horses he had bought for a total of 300 *ducats*,[14] and other merchandise he wished to trade. As the local exchange rate was between 9 and 14 slaves per horse, depending on the 'quality' of both humans and animals, he could expect at least 60 and perhaps as many as 100 slaves for his animals; he does not say whether he actually received any. What is known is that by the end of the fifteenth century so many horses had been shipped into West Africa through Arguin that the exchange rate had fallen to six or seven slaves/horse.

Also in the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese reported that they had opened a trading agency at Waddan on what was perhaps then the busiest road from Timbuctu to the Maghreb, 'but the rigours of the desert climate soon obliged its closing'.[15] If this account is true, it was a remarkable, almost unique, European intrusion into a main emporium of the jealously guarded Saharan gold- and slave-trading systems. But it was more likely to have been ended by local traders' opposition than the difficult climate, for Cadamosto had already found the people of Waddan to be 'most hostile' towards Christians.[16]

As far back as the 1450s a polygonal fortress had been built on a 200-foot cliff at Arguin and, thus protected, the port flourished for well over a century. In 1550 Spain absorbed Portugal and took over Arguin, but lost it to the French in 1638; the Dutch then followed. But after the Moroccan invasion of the Songhai Empire in 1591, and other troubles, the west Saharan traffic in gold, slaves and other exotica had moved to more secure roads further east, and Arguin was never again the rich threshold of opportunity it had been two centuries earlier.

There is little evidence that the European presence at Arguin disrupted west Saharan trade, and especially the northbound trade in black people. When it became clear that the Christians wanted to barter for slaves, rather than steal them in man-hunts, some local dealers would no doubt have tested

the new market, and the type and quality of the unfamiliar, 'exotic' European trade-goods on offer. A slave caravan speculatively diverted to the coast from Waddan had a hard journey; but so did all Saharan trade caravans. This westbound road to the Atlantic was only half the distance to the nearest markets on the desert fringes of southern Morocco. The lure of the Christian market may have disrupted some of the western desert slave traffic for a few seasons, with slave deliveries perhaps briefly falling short of demand in Moroccan markets. But the Saharan trading system, although largely set in organisational, financial and operating methods first perfected in the early Middle Ages, was able to react quickly to changing market conditions and to take advantage of new business opportunities as and where they arose. This surprising flexibility became very clear in the nineteenth century, when merchants were quickly able to adjust their patterns of trade in response to rapidly evolving conditions both in and beyond the desert. In the fifteenth as in the nineteenth century, so long as the necessary finance or credit, merchants, caravan personnel and, especially, camels for long-distance travel were available, there seems to have been no reason, all other things being equal, why after a few seasons' adjustment, the trade should not have met all its commitments, new and old. These included both the new demand for up to 1,000 slaves/year at Arguin (although the average was probably 600–700/year),[17] while established customers in western Saharan tribal and oasis communities, and in the large markets of Morocco itself, still wanted their 2,000 slaves/year. For it is likely that the necessary numbers of trade slaves to meet the market 'pull' of the system were readily available on the desert fringes of the western Sudan at the start of each yearly trading season (January–April). The organisation only failed to cope if the 'pull' of distant Maghrebi markets was exceeded by an unexpected 'push' as a sudden glut of surplus captives was fed into a system with only finite long-distance slave-handling capacities.[18]

The system managed to meet the fairly modest demands of the Portuguese at Arguin for perhaps a hundred years. By the mid-sixteenth century, the focus of the multinational Atlantic trade was shifting from the western Sahara and the Sudan to the more populous lands of equatorial West Africa. Despite the increasing demands on Africa for slaves for the Americas, the Saharan system was normally still able to find all it needed to supply its regular markets, and even to increase that supply in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such seems to have been the case even in the basins of the upper Niger, the Senegal and the Gambia, where the two trades sometimes competed directly with each other. Slaves were not even necessarily delivered to the nearest or most convenient Saharan or Atlantic entrepot from their first place of capture and/or enslavement: the West African slave-making, marshalling and marketing systems hardly allowed for such logistical organisation. Paul Lovejoy suggests that trans-Saharan trade still accounted for nearly 47 per cent of all African slave exports in the sixteenth century and the Atlantic trade for less than 28 per cent (the balance being the East

African and Red Sea trades). With increased traffic in the seventeenth century, the Sahara still accounted for nearly one-quarter of all African slave exports (65 per cent for the Atlantic), falling below 10 per cent only in the face of the monstrous movement of slaves across the Atlantic (82 per cent of all exports) in the eighteenth century.[19]

In the meantime, business had become harder for merchants in the desert trade. Hostility across the Mediterranean basin between Afro-Asian Islam and European Christendom had been largely contained within the manageable limits of mutual self-interest in the Middle Ages, despite war, piracy, raiding, and the Christian near-monopoly of Mediterranean commercial shipping from the Crusades onwards. But by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the forces of Ottoman Turkish imperialism and the vigourous Europe of Renaissance and Reformation were locked in an outright struggle for Mediterranean supremacy.

The Turks had come to power in Anatolia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; they expanded into the Balkans, took Constantinople in 1453 and Egypt in 1517. By then semi-independent corsairs were leading Turkey's growing naval power: in 1513 they seized the Island of Gerba, and in 1517 Algiers. Spain had in the meantime captured strongpoints along the North African coast, including Tripoli in 1510. Morocco never fell under Turkish rule but it, too, was beset by the troubles of the age. All trade, including the Saharan traffic, suffered from such disruptions. But traders on the central roads through Fezzan always had the choice of diverting caravans north-eastwards through Augila to Benghazi, Derna and other Cyrenaican outlets, or overland across the Western Desert to Egypt, when usual markets such as Tripoli were closed by war or hostile occupation.

Turkish power in the Mediterranean was checked with the failure to capture Malta in 1565 and at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.[20] With the subsequent peace among the great powers, an unofficial and sporadic naval war was waged in the Mediterranean between Muslim and Christian privateers, with all unprotected merchant shipping their potential victims. This phase lasted until the mid-seventeenth century. Then, and until the early nineteenth century, corsairing became an officially sponsored activity of all the Barbary powers,[21] from Tripoli in the east to Salé on the Atlantic coast of Morocco in the west.

This undeclared naval war delivered thousands of Christians, captured at sea or in raids on the coasts of southern Europe and islands, as slaves to the Barbary states. It has been suggested that there may have been between 20,000 and 50,000 such slaves in Algiers and surroundings in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; a peak of 10,000 in Tunis at the end of the sixteenth century; while Tripoli had only 1,500 such slaves, at most, in the late seventeenth century. Numbers fell in the eighteenth century as the main European fleets (France, Britain, Holland) became more powerful. By the late 1780s there were barely 500 European slaves in Algiers, with only 1,500 in Tunis and some 600 in Tripoli at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[22]

These were the captives who would not avoid enslavement by conversion to Islam ('Turning Turk' – an escape denied pagan black slaves), or who could not do so because they were neither rich nor important enough to be ransomed. While the women and girls were destined for the harems, even the unskilled male captives were an alternative to the black slaves brought across the Sahara. Skilled European male slaves consigned to the shipyards and arsenals made an essential contribution to the formidable fighting capacities of fast, light Barbary fleets.[23]

Corsairing, unlike piracy, was officially licensed and regulated. The plundering of the rich Christian merchant shipping of the Mediterranean by Barbary corsairs who were an arm of the state was a valuable source of revenue. At the same time, the regime in Tripoli and some of the other Barbary corsair nests were barely able to maintain the cyclical relationship between the land-based military power (or at least the threat of such power) needed to overawe the interior tribes and keep the desert slaving and general trade routes open, the receipts from corsairing that financed that military power, and which in turn upheld the central authority of the state. It was an especially difficult but vital relationship because in a place like Tripoli there were so few economic alternatives, apart from the black slave trade which, because of the taxes it yielded, was itself an integral part of the political-military-fiscal cycle.[24]

Both the main northern outlets of the Saharan slaving system, Morocco and Tripoli, (Algiers and Tunis were never particularly important) were not always able to keep even the northern stages of the desert trade roads under their direct protection. Indeed, the trans-Saharan slave trade operated largely beyond the control of any recognised state. It came instead under the patronage and 'protection' of unruly, unreliable and independently minded settled or nomadic tribespeople, or vague political entities, at or beyond the limits of the authority of the Tripoline or Moroccan body politic. In the case of Tripoli, the semi-circles of power and influence radiating inland very soon weakened with distance; indeed, municipal authority was not always effective even in the oasis immediately outside the city walls. Further off, on the Gefara Plain and in the more unruly lands to the south, successive rulers in Tripoli (including even the supposedly potent Turks) could only pretend to wield power, and sometimes levy taxes, through ambiguous and fluctuating alliances with recognised tribes and tribal groupings under their own acknowledged leaders. Such alliances were likely to work only so long as the tribes were too weak to resist the centralising hegemony of the state; normally, the desert and pre-desert people were quite vigourous enough to keep free of outside control.[25]

Thus from the late sixteenth century the Ottoman regime from its base in Tripoli tried and failed over some 50 years to secure the main slaving roads through Fezzan, rather than trust to the Ulad Mohammad rulers at Murzuk to do so on its behalf. Constantinople's desire for closer relations with the rising imperial power of Bornu no doubt reflected its attractions as an

apparently limitless source of black slaves (especially perhaps, as recruits for the Sultan's armies) and an exporter of limited quantities of gold. Although the Turks occupied Fezzan in 1577, and then advanced further down the Lake Chad road, they could not hold these gains; they also failed to extract any meaningful allegiance from Bornu. Rather, the ruler, Mai Idris Alooma, sent an embassy to Constantinople to protest at Turkish interference in the central Sahara, at the same time asking for Turkish fire-arms and gunners. These contacts, while rewarding Bornu with new and terrifying weapons reinforcing its military power and slave-raiding capacity, gave the Turks illusions of sovereignty in the central Sudan that lasted until the very end of the nineteenth century. Yet there is evidence that Bornu sent consignments of slaves through Fezzan to Tripoli, either as tribute or, more likely, as an exchange of diplomatic gifts with the ruling Dey, by then semi-independent of Constantinople. One hundred young men and 100 girls were sent in 1638, and a consignment of 125 slaves, including dwarfs and eunuchs, in 1686.[26] In 1626 the semi-independent regime in Tripoli had recognised the almost equal independence of the Ulad Mohammad dynasty at Murzuk in return for a substantial, regular tribute in gold and slaves. Every year, the ruler of Fezzan and his successors were committed to deliver 4,000 *mithqals*'-worth of tribute to Tripoli, half in gold, and the balance in slaves.[27]

For the purposes of the tribute, the treaty set the prices of slaves at 25 *mithqals* for a male slave, 30 for a female, and 80 for a eunuch. These prices are said to have been based on current market rates in Tripoli rather than Fezzan. Reflecting a month's hard journey from Fezzan, Tripoli prices were obviously much higher than those in Murzuk. Although the Fezzanese authorities gained from the arrangement, they also had to meet the costs of delivering the full consignment of slaves to Sokna, which was considered the northern limit of Fezzan; they also had to make up any slave losses on the road from Murzuk. The value put on the slaves by the treaty (and it offers interesting comparisons with prices from other times and places), suggests that a typical year's tribute, apart from the gold, might have amounted to about 40 women and girls, about 20 men and boys (at the usual 2:1 sex ratio of trans-Saharan slave traffic) and two or three eunuchs. At 80 *mithqals* each (the value of just over three male slaves or just under three females), the eunuchs do seem to have been rather undervalued. The treaty also allowed for the appointment of the *Bey al-Noba*, an important official sent to Fezzan by the ruling Dey of Tripoli every year to collect the tribute on his behalf; the practice continued until the early nineteenth century. Down to that time, successive rulers in Tripoli actively intervened in Fezzan only when the tribute was well overdue. The threat of invasion and violent retribution from the north usually ensured that it was regularly paid, although, as time went by, not necessarily in full. Perhaps because the tribute was partly paid as a quantity of slaves determined by price rather than as a specified number of males, females and eunuchs, its value seems to have fallen in the two centuries of its existence. In 1818 the British traveller, George Lyon, described

the Fezzan tribute as 'trifling … but a very small part of the immense gains of the reigning Sultan'. Lyon estimated it to have been worth only $5,000/year,[28] perhaps less than half its stipulated value in 1626.

* * *

Compared to the Regency of Tripoli, Morocco was a much more complex place. It had far more people: at least 3 million in the sixteenth century, compared with a few hundred thousand in Tripoli. While it was richer and more powerful, it was even more deeply divided by its regional and national geography and by race, tribe, clan, creed, politics and economics: it was, after all, a recognised 'empire'. But its Sultans were too often preoccupied with upholding their authority within the supposed confines of the state (the perennial struggle between the *Bled al-Makhzen*, the land of government, and the *Bled al-Siba*, the land of dissent). In and beyond the Atlas Mountains, the Berber tribes were usually outside the Sultan's sphere of political and fiscal control. They may have recognised him as the *Amir al-Muminin* (Prince of the Faithful) but they declined to pay his taxes, obey his administrators, or serve in his armies, unless physically forced to do so. As in Tripoli, only rarely and briefly could the state project its power down the Saharan trading roads, no matter how important they may have been to its economic and even political welfare and stability. Morocco, moreover, was less well placed than Tunis or Tripoli to import and re-export black slaves, being at the 'wrong' end of the Mediterranean basin, far from the markets of the Levant. But its great 'imperial' cities offered slave-dealers much bigger, richer and more sophisticated internal markets than did small places like Tripoli or Benghazi.

By the sixteenth century, the Songhai Empire, along the middle courses of the River Niger, was linked to Morocco by two main roads. The first passed almost due north through Arawan, Taodeni and Taghaza to Sijilmasa (with easterly branches to Tuat and thence via Ouargla to Tunis, and via Ghadames to Tripoli). A more westerly road led to Walata, Waddan and Tindouf, with its choice of ways to Sijilmasa or Marrakesh. Attempts by the Moroccan Saadian Empire in the sixteenth century permanently to secure these routes, and especially their southbound salt and the northbound gold and slave trades, had the reverse of the intended effect. All trade was disrupted, and only recovered when Moroccan military interference ended. Such intrusions included the military occupation of Waddan in 1543–44 and 1584; the seizure of the salt-mines at Taghaza in 1585 (their output was the basic exchange for gold and slaves in Songhai); and the great invasion of Songhai itself in 1591, which owed much of its military success to its firearms.[29] The economic and social disruptions of the Moroccan conquest may partly explain the decline of Timbuctu; climate change and desertification in the western Sahel and Sudan, especially in the 1650s, may have been another factor in the general eastward shift of trans-Saharan trade links in the seventeenth century.[30] The presence of the Portuguese, and later the Spanish, French, English, Genoese

and Dutch at half a dozen Moroccan Atlantic ports, and at others on or near the Straits of Gibraltar, also spoiled traditional trading patterns while bringing in European products (notably textiles and arms) and opening up European markets to Moroccan agricultural produce (notably sugar in England). But there seems to have been at this time little or no commercial re-export of black slaves from either Moroccan Atlantic or Mediterranean outlets: local markets apparently absorbed all those brought across the Sahara by the regular trade caravans.[31] One exception may have been special consignments of high-quality slaves sent from time to time as diplomatic gifts by Moroccan Sultans to other Islamic potentates up and down the Mediterranean.

Black slaves had been recruited into Muslim armies since the early Islamic centuries, and slave soldiers were common in sub-Saharan Islam.[32] But in Morocco the long-reigning Sultan of the new Alawi dynasty, Mulay Ismael (reigned 1672–1727), in a few years created a formidable army of up to 150,000 mainly black slave soldiers, a standing force to resolve the state's perennial internal and external problems.[33] The process had started in 1678–79 with a slave raid in the south-west Sahara (southern Mauritania, in modern terms), which brought back some 2,000 slaves: the men were drafted into the Sultan's army, the females into domestic service in the barracks. This mass recruitment became even more oppressive with the Sultan's decree of 1699 enslaving all free blacks in Morocco and even allowing the compulsory purchase of privately owned male slaves. Thus, in defiance of normal Islamic practice, '… the colour of the skin was reason enough for a person to be enslaved and enrolled in the army'.[34] The ranks were still being filled with recruits seized during massive, yearly, state-organised raids into the south-west Saharan uplands (Shinqit), the western Sahel and the upper Senegal River valley. Drilled and trained over a period of eight years, and valued for their greater loyalty than the usual forces of unreliable Christian renegades or coerced Moroccans, the black troops and their womenfolk were encouraged to breed new generations of slave soldiers. This was a more certain way of filling the ranks than relying on unpredictable and irregular recruitment by raiding on the far side of the desert. Contemporary European observers remarked on the Sultan's massive imports of black slaves for military and other uses – 'blacks with which his kingdom is filled'. Mulay Ismael's ability to import so many people, apparently in the course of only a few trading seasons, no doubt reflected the decisive intervention and organisational ability of the state under that particular and extraordinary ruler. The commercial caravan system was not usually able to cope when such large and unexpected demands were put on it.[35]

Slave raids by the Moroccan military into the south-western Sahel and the western Sudan continued from the late-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, becoming a recurrent scourge every dry season in the 1720s and 1730s. This pattern of state-sponsored slave-raiding was to be repeated by Tripoli in the Chadian lands in the early nineteenth century, and on a far

larger scale by the Egypt of Mohammad Ali in the Nilotic Sudan, starting at about the same time. In their raids on settled communities of blacks, the Moroccans would pick out suitable boys over the age of five or six for the Saharan crossing and eventual eight years' training and then full service in the Sultan's armies. Suitable little girls were also taken for domestic service and eventual pairing-off with the black slave soldiers. The unwanted adolescents and adults were either sold off to middlemen supplying the Atlantic trade, or they were simply dispersed and abandoned near their deserted and ruined villages. Contemporary European accounts attest to the severity of the raids and the resultant economic and social devastation over great swathes of country. Other slaves who were fed into the desert trading system had been made during local wars, or in long-range slave raids deeper into the West African savannah by the Bambara and Tukolor states on the upper Niger. Slaves were filtered into both the Saharan and Atlantic trade systems; but Saharan middlemen who were active along the Niger Bend, were the main buyers of people for the desert trade,[36] with imported salt and horses as their main means of exchange.

Although huge numbers of unfortunates were enslaved every year in the western Sahel and Sudan, few of them crossed the full width of the Great Desert to Morocco. The casual inhumanity of new slaves' treatment, reflecting their cheapness and sheer abundance, and the ease of seizing replacements, killed off many during capture or in the early stages of captivity. Of the few survivors absorbed into the desert trading system, some were sold to buyers (both nomads and settled oasis-dwellers) along the way. Then it has been estimated that about 6 per cent of slaves in the average Morocco-bound caravan died on the road, a death rate that compares favourably with those on some of the central desert trails. Thus it is suggested that a modest yearly mean of only 2,000 slaves was imported into Morocco during the eighteenth century,[37] although the true figure might have been nearer to 3,000.

By the end of that century, Moroccan state-sponsored slaving expeditions had given way to the more common practice of slave-raiding by many small bands of freebooting 'Moors' (almost any 'White' Muslim of the western desert). Their methods of operating deep in the interior of West Africa were witnessed by the Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, on his first journey to the great River Niger in 1795–97. He considered those he met to be 'a subtle and treacherous race of people; and [they] take every opportunity of cheating and plundering the credulous and unsuspecting Negroes'.[38] Approaching the town of Segu on the upper Niger, Park met a caravan of 70 slaves making for the pre-desert country of Ludamar, whence they would be taken along the western road to Morocco. This was perhaps the first description by an outside witness of an early stage of the Sahara-bound trade in black slaves:

> They were tied together by their necks with thongs of a bullock's hide, twisted like a rope; seven slaves upon a thong; and a man with a musket between every seven. Many of the slaves were ill conditioned, and a

> great number of them women. In the rear came Sidi Mohammed's servant … [who] told me that these slaves were going to Morocco by way of Ludamar and the Great Desert.[39]

Clearly, some of these people would never complete the monstrous journey ahead of them. Once they had reached the Sahara itself, and any realistic hopes of escape had passed, slaves on the march would not normally have been tied to each other (only the Tebu slave-drivers of the central desert had to do so because they treated all their charges so badly). Nor would there have been the need Park mentions for ten armed men to guard a consignment of 70 captives, many of them women, for once in the high desert all lives, slave and free, depended on keeping up with the caravan.

* * *

The eighteenth century offers rather more statistics on the Saharan slave trade than earlier times, although they are still sparse and spasmodic compared with the statistics-obsessed nineteenth century. In a refinement of his earlier figures, Ralph Austen has suggested that the Maghreb as a whole received black slaves at an average rate of only 6,000/year between 1700 and 1799 (Morocco 2,000; Algeria 500; Tunisia 800; 'Libya' 2,700). Thus 45 per cent of all slave traffic in an average year was processed through 'Libya' (the Regency of Tripoli) and one-third through Morocco. Algeria and Tunisia together accounted for less than one-quarter.[40]

Between 1753 and 1756 the French Consul in Tripoli kept a yearly count of slaves arriving there from the two main markets of the central desert trade, Fezzan (presumably Murzuk) and Ghadames (see Table 4.1). These averaged l,413 slaves/year over the four years, but with great variations from some years to others. Trade during the first three years under review was clearly very depressed, with arrivals well below the average yearly Tripoli import of over 2,000 slaves/year. But in 1756 the Consul was able to report that no less than four caravans had arrived in February that year (including one each from Fezzan and Ghadames on 21st February), bringing more than 2,000 slaves with them, and he noted that there would as a result be a revival of local business that had been languishing for some time.[41] The arrival of a caravan from Timbuctu with 300 blacks at the end of May was a bonus normally occurring only every four or five years; the Consul does not mention that the caravan had probably travelled by way of Ghadames.

The irregularity of such traffic between one place and another, and from one year to the next, and the fact that the figures match in scale and variation similar runs of figures for the mid-nineteenth century, give them their authenticity. For the year 1766 another French Consul in Tripoli reported the arrival of 2,500 slaves from Fezzan and 300 from Ghadames. He also reported, as his predecessor had done ten years before, the separate arrival of a caravan of 200 slaves from Timbuctu, clearly still an event occurring only every four or five years.[42]

Table 4.1 Slave arrivals in Tripoli, 1753–56

Year	*From*	*No. of slaves*
1753		
Jan	Ghadames	600
Dec	Fezzan	500
		Total 1,100
1754		
Jan 8	Ghadames	450
Sep 19	Fezzan	300
Nov 16	Fezzan	100
Dec 6	Fezzan	80
		Total 930
1755		
Jan 10	Fezzan	800
Sep 22	Fezzan	150
Nov10	Fezzan	50
Nov 25	Fezzan	70
		Total 1,070
1756		
Feb 9	Fezzan	680
Feb 15	Ghadames	475
Feb 21	Fezzan and Ghadames	1,100
May 30	Timbuctu	300
		Total 2,555
		Annual average 1,413

Sources: Renault, 'La traite des esclaves noirs en Libye au XVIIIe siècle', JAH, Vol. 23, No.2, 1982, p. 169; Dyer, *The Foreign Trade*, pp. 124–5.

In 1767 The former British Consul in Tripoli, the Hon. Archibald Campbell Fraser, reported that 800 slaves arrived yearly from Fezzan and 200 from Ghadames.[43] In 1780, the French Consul estimated annual slave arrivals at Tripoli at 3,000.[44] Mark Dyer seems to express the truth behind these hyperactive figures when he points out that 'all these estimates can be accepted as reasonable, if they are taken together to represent a range rather than individually to represent a consistent quantity of slaves'. Thus Consul Fraser was quite wrong to suppose that the totals of one year's depressed trading could be reliably reported as the norm for every year. Renault suggests that slaves passed through Fezzan at an average of 2,500/year in the eighteenth century, plus as few hundred through Ghadames.[45] Austen (see above) proposes an annual average figure for the whole of Libya of 2,700 in the eighteenth century.[46]

The French Consul in Tripoli in 1778 estimated slave *exports* there at an average of 3,000/year, which seems excessive compared with the number of slaves variously reported to have arrived in the town in the 1750s and 1760s. Dyer believes that a careful reading of the available sources suggests that

between 1,000 and 3,000 slaves were exported to the Levant through Tripoli every year.[47] But the estimated export of up to 3,000 slaves/year seems to overlook the fact there was a thriving demand for slaves in Tripoli and its oasis, and that shipments of slaves on such a scale would imply total imports into the town of at least 4,000 slaves/year. Such traffic in one year was not impossible, but still unlikely, given the physical constraints of the Saharan trading system. The difficulty with all these figures is that, because the trade was irregular, and could vary so much from one year to another, such seemingly excessive figures for one year's traffic, contrasting with Consul Fraser's remarkably low figure for 1767, may both be equally valid for the one year at issue and, although questionable in themselves, well within the average range for the century as a whole. Renault believes, reasonably enough, that a figure of around 1,000 slaves/year exported from Tripoli at the end of the eighteenth century is about right, the actual figures probably ranging from 500–600 in some years to over 2,000 in others.[48]

These figures seem to take little account of the export trade through other outlets such as Misurata, Benghazi and Derna through Augila and, perhaps most important of all, the long route through Augila to Egypt. Dyer points out that merchants in Fezzan and Ghadames tended to send their slave caravans overland to Cairo or to Tunis when the land route to Tripoli was closed. He also estimates an export trade of 500 slaves/year from Murzuk to Augila, whence they would have gone either to Benghazi or to Cairo. But there seem to be no eighteenth century figures for any Libyan port other than Tripoli, for foreign consuls were then reporting only from there. Misurata, in particular, is likely to have been an active slaving outlet, although unseen and unrecorded by any foreign observer. This was the nearest seaport to Fezzan and thus offered a shorter journey, by some 200 km, than Tripoli for slave caravans making for the coast. Lying further east than Tripoli, Misurata also meant shorter voyages for slave ships making for the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, slave arrivals and exports at Misurata are readily available only for 1854 and 1855. Applied retrospectively, they suggest that in the eighteenth and earlier centuries, this market probably exported a few hundred slaves every year, and these might usefully be added to (if not already included in) estimates of the annual import and re-export slave trade of the Regency of Tripoli as a whole.

Clearly, the trade in black slaves through Tripoli was one of the mainstays of the regency's eighteenth-century economy, and remained so until the later nineteenth century. The trade figures of Consul Fraser for 1767 show total yearly exports from the regency to have been worth around 100,000 *sequins.* With the Tripoli *sequin* worth 8/6d Sterling (2.35 = £1) this was equal to £42,000 Sterling, of which exports of black slaves to the Levant were worth 40,000 *sequins* (£17,000 Sterling).[49] The difficulty with Fraser's figures is that he records that only 1,000 slaves were imported yearly into the regency through Fezzan and Ghadames (as may indeed have been the case for the

one year he reported) and that all of them were re-exported to the Levant. This was clearly not the case because it overlooks the large domestic market for slaves in Tripoli and its oasis which seems to have absorbed about half the slaves brought into the town in any year of normal traffic. Consul Fraser may have been more accurate in assessing the importance of the black slave trade to the central Saharan economies. He suggests that it represented about 86 per cent by value of the imports of Fezzan (32,000 *sequins* for only 800 slaves, out of 37,380 *sequins* total) and 82 per cent by value of the import trade of Ghadames (8,000 *sequins* for 200 slaves out of a total of 9,725 *sequins*, including 1,000 *sequins*'-worth of gold dust).[50]

The importance of the black slave trade in late-eighteenth century Tripoli was attested in passing in the famous letters by Miss Tully, sister of the British Consul, Richard Tully. She called it 'one of their principal modes of traffic'. Slaves were sold, she reported in 1783, in the smaller of Tripoli's two bazaars: 'thither only black men and women are brought for sale!'[51] Blacks were bought by 'rich people of the place who occasionally sell them immediately to merchants waiting to ship them to other parts'. Miss Tully also noted that 'They do not excel here in shops, the best of these being little better than booths, though their contents are sometimes invaluable, consisting of pearls, gold, gems and precious drugs'.[52] She found Tripoli dilapidated and in a 'ruinous state'; and certainly modern Tripoli shows but slight material evidence of the past to suggest that it was ever a wealthy business environment, a trading counter serving Europe, nearer Asia and inner Africa. While Consul Fraser and his European colleagues reported on the apparently thriving import and export trade of eighteenth-century Tripoli, Fraser also rightly drew attention to a serious deficit in this business: 'The General Ballance in Trade against Tripoli is paid of[f] by the sale of slaves taken in their Piracies and the Money spent amongst them by the Agents and Consuls of the several European powers with whom they are at peace'.[53]

In other words, only the continuing activity of Tripoli's corsair fleet in the Mediterranean, plus the payment of substantial annual 'protection' by European maritime powers from attack could ensure the regency's solvency. But maintaining the essential contributions of the corsairs, and the payment of 'protection' from their attentions, became much more difficult in the later eighteenth century as European powers grew increasingly confident in their command of the sea and more contemptuous of the pretensions of the Barbary city-states. The lack of much visible wealth in the city itself, and the evident poverty of the regency as a whole, the absence of outward signs of material wellbeing, suggest that the margins of economic survival were narrow indeed by the late eighteenth century. And this general indigence prevailed despite the contributions of a legitimate economy and trade, and the two 'parasitical' activities of slave-trading and corsairing: 'parasitical' in the sense that they thrived only by preying on the lives, possessions or enterprise of other peoples. Thus, with the effective end of corsairing soon after the Napoleonic Wars, the regency's financial crisis could seemingly be

resolved only by further development of the other and most ready source of national income, the trans-Saharan trade in black slaves.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Britain was interested in Tripoli as one of the best placed and most promising starting-points for the geographical, commercial and diplomatic penetration of Africa. It was an interest with long-term implications for the fortunes of all the trade of the central Sahara, and particularly the trade in black slaves.

At that time the outside world knew very little of Africa and its geography. Access to the interior was barred by hostile natives, difficult communications and tropical disease, while there seemed few business opportunities inside a continent where native middlemen monopolised the slave and other export trades. Europe's knowledge of Africa was based on Classical sources at least 1,500 years old, on sketchy and mostly outdated Muslim accounts up to the sixteenth century, and on contemporary familiarity with the coasts and their immediate hinterlands.[54] Then in 1788 the curiosity of the age, the fresh vigour of British intellectual inquiry, prompted concerted efforts to explore with the formation of the 'Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa' (commonly known as the African Association). Its first objective was to solve the mystery of the rise, course and outlet of West Africa's greatest river, the Niger.

Not one of the ten explorers sponsored by the African Association between 1788 and 1830 penetrated the continent easily. The most successful was Mungo Park, who reached the Niger from the west coast. Among those who tried the northern approach through Tripoli was an Arabist, Simon Lucas, who in 1788–89 managed to reach Misurata, where tribal unrest spoiled his plans to visit Fezzan and the lands beyond. But he used his Arabic to learn much about the interior from local merchants. The report he wrote on his return to London confirmed that the Atlantic slave trade was not the only one out of Africa; that the traffic in black slaves across the Sahara from Bornu and Hausaland, and their re-export of many of them through Tripoli to the Levant, was the mainstay of the Fezzanese and Tripoline economies; and that slaves and gold dust were the traditional yearly tribute from Fezzan to Tripoli. He also reported on the activities of Fezzanese slavers in Sudan.[55]

Most of this was new to the African Association. Its members may have been vaguely aware of a 'Muslim slave trade' out of Africa, but they were not primarily concerned even about the Atlantic slave trade as such, or the emerging movement in Britain for its abolition. But revelations about the central role of slavery in Africa, and the importance of branches of the slave trade other than the Atlantic traffic, kept appearing in the travel accounts of the explorers sponsored by the association during its 42-year existence.

Ten years after Lucas travelled, a young German sponsored by the association, Friedrich Hornemann, reached Murzuk from Cairo, the first known European in Fezzan. He was seven months (November 1798–June 1799) in that main market of the central Saharan slave trade, and he sent back to London a solid report on what he had learned. He threw some light on

Murzuk as a slaving counter, and drew attention to the ruler's habit of raising extra revenue by man-stealing expeditions against the Tebu of Borku and other Saharan peoples.[56]

For 20 years the Napoleonic wars disrupted the exploration of Africa. Then, from 1814, Britain's attempts to open up the inner continent through the Regency of Tripoli, and the good offices of its ruler, Yusuf Pasha Karamanli, were stimulated by a remarkable Consul General, Colonel Hanmer Warrington, who held the post until 1846.[57] Warrington did more than anyone to make the central Saharan roads Britain's exclusive highway into Africa. He duly convinced himself and others, on very slight evidence, that the abolition of slave-raiding and the slave trade would open up the continent to 'legitimate' commerce, enlightenment and 'civilisation', all processes from which Britain stood to gain more than any other power. Playing on the trans-Saharan ambitions of Yusuf Pasha Karamanli, Consul Warrington between 1819 and 1826 promoted three important British expeditions from Tripoli. In 1819 the Ritchie–Lyon Mission reached Murzuk, learning and publishing much of value about Fezzan and what lay beyond.[58] In 1822–25 the Bornu Mission (Walter Oudney, Hugh Clapperton and Dixon Denham) reached Lake Chad and explored the western Sudan, making important diplomatic contacts there.[59] In 1825–26 Major Alexander Gordon Laing reached Timbuctu from Tripoli, but was killed on the return journey, and all his papers lost.[60] For the next 15 years, all Warrington's various schemes for African penetration through Tripoli came to nothing. Only in 1841 was he at last authorised to appoint a vice consul at Murzuk, which he had first suggested some 25 years earlier. Finally opened in 1843, the post was meant to promote British commercial and diplomatic interests in the central desert and beyond, and to observe and discourage slave-raiding and trading. Although the project never matched Warrington's high hopes, it did provide regular and consistent runs of statistics on the central Saharan slave trade through Murzuk in the 1840s and on into the 1850s, which offer more authoritative information on this main branch of the desert traffic than any other contemporary source.

5 Faith in abolition

> The suppression of the Saharan Traffic would remove the only barrier to a free and uninterrupted Intercourse with the Interior [of Africa].
>
> Consul Hanmer Warrington

Islam has no theological or legal mechanism for simply abolishing slavery and the slave trade. Hence, in part, the slowness of these processes in the Islamic World.[1] Some Islamic societies – Morocco is one example – largely evaded the issue of abolition until the overwhelming family, social, economic and political pressures of the twentieth century seemingly at last produced some of the results required by the Great Powers. Yet the fact that slavery and the slave trade that supplies it are again becoming common in Sudanic Africa in the twenty-first century suggests that perhaps the abolitionist impulse was merely a temporary and superficial political and moral imperative unacceptable over the long term in some African societies.

Britain's increasing obsession with slavery and slave trade abolition from the late eighteenth century on may be attributed to Christian moral processes, to changing economic and social priorities, or to a combination of these and other factors.[2] Having been the most successful of all Atlantic slaving nations in the eighteenth century (when British ships delivered over two-fifths of all the Americas' slave imports), Britain in 1807 forbad its subjects to engage in any slave trade, and then began to press other powers to do likewise. This campaign of great cost and danger that continues on a lesser scale to this day has been given too little historical recognition, not least in Britain itself. In 1838 the institution of slavery was abolished in all British possessions.

To the abolitionists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Atlantic slave trade was the only one that mattered. They were to all practical purposes not aware of other branches of the trade out of Africa, and especially the relatively small, quietly persistent, and very ancient trade across the Sahara. And even when the abolitionist movement around 1838 began to realise that Africans were exporting their own people as slaves across the Sahara, and from the coasts of East Africa, the Atlantic slave trade remained

its foremost concern. This was an enduring and distorted priority that still makes the Atlantic traffic seem to the popular imagination the only slave trade that ever existed. or certainly the only one that matters, and to which any guilt or blame attaches.

When the British Consul, the Hon. Archibald Fraser, reported in 1767 on Tripoli's trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean trade with inner Africa, southern Europe and the Levant,[3] he rightly stressed the importance of the slave trade to the regency's economic wellbeing and balance of payments. But far from expressing distaste for the trade, or prospects for ending it, he assessed British shippers' chances of sharing in the lucrative black slave carrying traffic from Tripoli to the Levant, then almost monopolised by French ships. Reporting five years before Lord Mansfield's celebrated judgement on slavery in England, Consul Fraser had priorities typical of the age. Slavery and the associated trade in slaves in such places as Barbary or the Americas were simply taken for granted, as perhaps unfortunate but wholly necessary practices. Contemporary European visitors to Tripoli and other slave-owning societies showed little curiosity or moral sensitivity about social abuses and conditions that perhaps seemed to them typical of the common lot of most servile people in those harsher and more uncaring times. Even Miss Tully, the sister of the British Consul in Tripoli, Richard Tully, and an acute observer of the local political and social scene of the 1780s, made only passing references in her celebrated letters to the moral repugnance of Tripoline slavery and slave-dealing.[4] When the African Association was formed in London in 1788 to promote African discovery, slavery and the slave trade were not among its main concerns, and most of its members seem to have been indifferent to them.[5]

The abolitionists at home, convinced that abolition was the key to Africa's social and economic advancement, might usefully have paid more attention to the first-hand, published observations on slavery in the inner continent by the explorer Mungo Park. They might in particular have pondered his prediction that the results of abolition would 'neither be so extensive or beneficial as many wise and worthy people fondly expected.'[6] He implied that the central and western Sudan would still be raided for slaves for the internal, western Saharan and trans-Saharan markets long after the Atlantic traffic had been curbed – exactly what did happen in the century after he travelled.

The first British Consul in Tripoli to be officially shocked by the Saharan slave trade, and to propose its suppression, was Colonel Hanmer Warrington. After taking up his post in 1814, he was at first more concerned with 'white' slavery – Tripoli's continuing enslavement of European Christians – than the regency's traffic in black Africans. There were still about 600 white (mostly Italian) slaves in Tripoli in 1815 when the Congress of Vienna authorised Great Britain to end Christian slavery in the Mediterranean by suitable diplomatic and naval pressures on the offending Barbary states, an objective finally achieved about 1820. Consul Warrington had already, in 1818, noticed the black slave traffic through Tripoli in the context of of the

overall import and export trades. Later that year he reported on the arrival of a large caravan from Fezzan. Among goods worth a total of $293,000, it brought gold dust worth $150,000 (51 per cent) and 1,300 slaves (44 per cent of the caravan's value), at an average of $100 per head.[7] According to a later report by the Swedish Consul in Tripoli, slave prices there ranged from $400/head for eunuchs, to $120–150 for women 'according to beauty', and $100 each for grown men and just nubile girls.[8]

Consul Warrington seems to have been made aware of the horrors of the Saharan slave trade only when the British travellers Joseph Ritchie and George Lyon began to correspond with him and with London from the slaving centre of Murzuk, which they had reached in May 1819. The purpose of this government-sponsored mission was to open a temporary vice consulate in Murzuk (which Warrington had proposed to further British commercial and diplomatic interests) and later to cross the Sahara to the River Niger at Timbuctu and follow its course to its outlet. But the issues of slavery, slave-raiding and slave-trading almost inescapably came to pre-occupy the mission, Consul Warrington in Tripoli, and its official sponsors in London. As early as June 1819 Warrington was raising with London prospects for 'the suppression of the Black Traffic'.[9]

George Lyon's accounts of the Fezzanese slave trade are the first by an independent, outside witness. His travelling companion, Joseph Ritchie, died in Murzuk in November 1819, but later that winter Lyon spent some six weeks in southern Fezzan where he saw and learned much of slavery, slave-raiding and slave-trading. Returning to Tripoli early in 1820 in the company of a slave caravan. he saw just how the trade slaves, most of them women and girls, were treated on the march over this easiest stage of the whole Saharan crossing. Lyon's despatches, and the publication in 1820 of his most readable travel book by John Murray (the leading promoter of such travel writing), gave abolitionists in Tripoli and London their first factual understanding of the true nature and scale of the Saharan slave trade. This could now be seen as a separate and clearly pressing issue under the broad but vague contemporary heading of 'Muslim slavery'.[10]

Although it set out after Lyon's return to London, the government-funded Bornu Mission of 1821–25 (Dr Walter Oudney, Lt Hugh Clapperton, RN, and Lt Dixon Denham) was never asked officially to look into or report on slavery or the slave trade during its travels deep into the African interior. Yet once on the road from Tripoli to Fezzan, the travellers became painfully familiar with slaving practices that were then endemic in Saharan and Sudanese societies, and indeed contributed much to their economies, providing in particular the means of exchange for goods imported through North Africa from Europe and the Levant. In its despatches and in its final published account of its travels and discoveries in the western and central Sudan, this most successful mission added to Lyon's findings. Here was further basic, factual material for the slowly emerging cause of abolition in the Sahara and – much more important – in its Sudanese sources of supply.[11]

While in the Sudan, the travellers learned that on slave raids, two people died for every one enslaved. Most of the male prisoners were killed on capture 'as being of the least value and the most trouble'. Of the surviving captives, three-quarters soon died 'from famine and barbarous treatment'.[12] In an unpublished final report,[13] Denham made the point that the slave trade from the Sudan into and across the Sahara owed its origins and survival to 'the Moorish traders whose avarice and cupidity are beyond all belief'. They refused all means of payment other than slaves for the trade-goods they brought from the north. Denham estimated that they made up to 500 per cent profit on the trade (in fact a gross exaggeration: see Chapter 6). But he did quote the effective ruler of Bornu, Shaikh al-Kanemi, as telling him, 'Arabs who come here will have nothing else but slaves. Why don't you send us your merchants?'[14] Denham claimed also that 'the most respectable' of the merchants he met would prefer 'legitimate' trade to slave-dealing. In the great Hausa state of Sokoto, meanwhile, Hugh Clapperton was explaining to Sultan Bello that abolition would largely depend on Britain's ability to reach the interior from the Atlantic coast and replace slavery and the slave trade with alternative 'legitimate' business.[15]

In London, a few of the better-informed abolitionists were already turning from their perennial obsession with the Atlantic traffic to the so-called 'Muslim' trade, including the trans-Saharan. They included the foremost British political philosopher of the day, Jeremy Bentham; the publisher John Murray; James Scarlett, MP; and John Barrow, Secretary of the Navy, who was in confidential correspondence with Consul Warrington in Tripoli. Barrow had his own theories about the course and outlet of the River Niger (aired in Murray's influential *Quarterly Review*) and was thus an essential and determined sponsor of both the Ritchie–Lyon and Bornu missions. One of the London abolitionists' best sources was a young visiting Tripoline, Hassuna D'Ghies, eldest son of Mohammed D'Ghies, one of Yusuf Pasha Karamanli's former foreign ministers. Young D'Ghies made a further contribution to the Saharan abolitionist debate in London with a pamphlet, clearly influenced by Bentham, expressing the belief that African slavery would be ended by the 'civilisation' that encouraged agriculture, commerce 'and the peaceful employment of civilised people'[16] For plain-thinking Consul Warrington in Tripoli, this Benthamite theory of the redeeming powers of 'civilisation' that he in due course picked up from D'Ghies, became the key to abolition and 'legitimate' trade. Warrington, indeed, was to spend much time and effort trying to persuade Yusuf Pasha Karamanli to give up slave-raiding and slave-trading, leading, he expected, to the eventual collapse of slavery in Tripoli itself. But his superiors in London were not convinced that the large sums the Pasha demanded as 'compensation' for his anticipated loss of slaving revenues were worth the dubious concessions on offer.

The murder of Warrington's son-in-law, Major Alexander Gordon Laing, as he returned home after reaching Timbuctu from Tripoli in 1826, was one cause of the crisis in Anglo-Tripolitan relations that helped to stop British

Saharan exploration for some 20 years. At home, the main abolitionist movement was still preoccupied with Atlantic slave-trading and British colonial slavery, and to all practical purposes was not worried about a relatively small and little-known trade for which Britain had no direct responsibility. The achievement of British colonial slave emancipation from August 1834 was understood by many as the end of the main abolitionist task. But the revival of the movement with the formation of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) in 1839 started the drive for universal abolition that continues until this day. Thenceforth, Britain had a self-imposed duty to abolish slavery and the slave trade wherever they existed. But so far as the Sudanese–Saharan trades were concerned, the Foreign Office in London simply lacked enough hard and consistent evidence (in contrast with the random and anecdotal accounts of the explorers) on which to base a diplomatic case for abolition with the relevant powers. Not until the 1840s did British consular posts in the Regency of Tripoli begin to contribute to the Saharan abolitionist debate the regular trade statistics so valued by the Victorian bureaucratic mind.

By that time the issue of 'Muslim' slavery had been given fresh impetus by events in Britain and Africa. The existence of the Saharan slave trade as one of the main sources of supply for much wider slaving enterprise in the Ottoman Empire was first brought to the attention of the British public in 1839 with the appearance in print of the latest thinking of the leading abolitionist, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. *The African Slave Trade* was followed in 1840 by the full edition, *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*, which included a whole chapter on 'The Mohammedan Slave Trade'. Buxton had little new to say about the Saharan trade as such, apart from providing some exaggerated annual transit, mortality and marketing figures. But his Saharan material was clearly drawn from and influenced by the published travel accounts of George Lyon and the Bornu Mission; so, too, were the relevant sections of another influential book, James M'Queen's *A Geographical Survey of Africa.* also published in 1840. Although both Buxton and M'Queen gave needed publicity to the Saharan abolitionist cause, there was still much ignorance of how the Sudan–Saharan trade worked, its size and scope, and how such traffic – then well beyond the reach of British power or influence – might be stopped.

The means of finding out seemed to lie with the abolitionist movement itself, newly organised as the BFASS. The issue of Ottoman slavery was raised at the society's general Anti-Slavery Convention, a remarkable public gathering of the great and the good in June 1840. The meeting, with Prince Albert in the chair, passed a resolution calling on the foreign secretary to persuade the Sultan-Caliph himself to issue such declarations 'as are likely to lead to the entire suppression of slavery in the Countries subject to the Sultan's government'.[17] The abolitionists simply assumed that Lord Palmerston would want to use Britain's pro-Turkish role in the current Eastern Crisis as a suitable diplomatic lever on the Sublime Porte. But clearly they had no

understanding of the impossibility of abolishing slavery at a stroke by an appropriate *firman* in an Islamic setting. Failing to appreciate that the Ottoman Empire was, as always, 'a sum of delays laid end to end', they seemed to believe that the Sultan's decisive public condemnation would simply have the immediate desired effect. Lord Palmerston duly instructed the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Lord Ponsonby. He, however, had no illusions about the likely outcome, which was indeed negative, and there the matter rested.[18] But Palmerston, while aware of the risks of so direct an approach, accepted the need to take some action on 'Muslim' slavery in the face of popular abolitionist enthusiasm at home, and to profit from Britain's helpful role in the Eastern Crisis.

So it was that Consul Warrington in Tripoli found that the proposals for dealing with the Saharan slave trade that he had been making, and that had been largely ignored, for the past 20 years were at last becoming acceptable in London. His long-cherished project for opening a vice consulate at Murzuk, the core of central Saharan slave-trading, was approved in July 1840.[19] But because of difficulties with the Turkish Pasha in Tripoli, Askar Ali, the post was not opened until March 1843. The Vice Consul, Giambattista Gagliuffi, then began to promote 'legitimate' trade through Murzuk and to compile the brief but invaluable yearly statistical reports on the slave trade that were to continue, with two breaks, until 1854 (see Chapter 6).

In October 1840 Lord Palmerston had written to Warrington:

> I have to desire that you will take such steps as you think will be most likely to induce the Moorish Chiefs themselves to give up, and prevent other persons from continuing, the practice of procuring slaves for exportation from Tripoli to the Levant.[20]

Eight years earlier Warrington had tried to mediate between the dying Karamanli regime and Shaikh Abd-al-Jallil Saif-al-Nassir, chief of the large and rebellious Awlad Slaiman tribe that had cut the Fezzan road. Six years later, in 1838, he had again tried to do the same on behalf of the new Turkish regime in Tripoli. Directed by Lord Palmerston, he now tried for a third time, believing Abd-al-Jallil to be a more reliable potential agent of British central Saharan interests than the Karamanlis had been, or the Turks were likely to be. He believed the shaikh could and would end slavery, the slave trade and slave-raiding throughout the central desert. Although Warrington seemed to have achieved this remarkable diplomatic coup in 1842, the project collapsed in disaster when the Turks captured and beheaded the shaikh, sent his pickled skull to Constantinople, and dispersed his tribe.[21]

In the meantime, British consuls in North Africa and in other parts of the Ottoman Empire had been instructed by the Foreign Office, through the Ambassador in Constantinople, Lord Ponsonby, to open negotiations with local rulers on slave trade abolition.[22] These preparations by Palmerston seem almost to have been intended to ensure continued British involvement

in the Saharan approach to inner Africa and its problems should the great anti-slavery expedition up the River Niger in 1841–42 not live up to its high expectations. Until this clamourous and very public test of the main theories set out in Fowell Buxton's writings ended in disaster, the expedition had suggested that the Niger really did offer Britain the best route into the interior of West Africa.[23]

But Palmerston's momentum was not kept up. He left office in August 1841 and his successor at the Foreign Office for the next five years, Lord Aberdeen, was unwilling to push the Ottoman Empire too hard towards reform. Thus he urged the new British Ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Stratford Canning, not to concern himself with the empire's domestic affairs, a policy that seemed to mirror Canning's own reluctance to interfere, in particular, in practices of slavery and slave-trading that he considered to be acceptably benign.[24]

The only British consul fully to carry out Lord Palmerston's instructions of 1840 to open abolition talks with the local ruler was the long-serving Sir Thomas Reade in Tunis. The way he swiftly won the case for slavery and slave trade abolition with the ruling bey, Ahmed Pasha, seemed more to reflect *realpolitik* than heartfelt acceptance of the consul's arguments.[25] After the French occupation of Algiers in 1830 and the later French advance into northern and eastern Algeria, the Bey found an aggressive and powerful neighbour on his western frontier. In neighbouring Tripoli in 1835 the summary overthrow of the Karamanlis – a dynasty as practically independent of Turkey as his own – and its replacement by direct rule from Constantinople, made his eastern frontier seem as insecure as his western. Only closer ties and cooperation with Great Britain seemed to offer some guarantee of protection from overmuch French or Turkish interference, even if it did mean accepting the new British ideology of universal slavery emancipation and slave trade abolition.

Thus when Consul Reade broached the highly sensitive subject of abolition with the Bey early in 1841, he found that he was in effect pushing at an open door. In an audience with Reade in April, the Bey undertook immediately to abolish slavery in his dominions, as well as the export of slaves. He set an immediate example by freeing all his own slaves.[26] To reassure the Bey that this extraordinary initiative would not cause difficulties with his nominal overlord, the Ottoman Sultan, Palmerston wrote to Reade ' … the Bey may set his mind at rest and may confidently rely on the friendship and good offices of England to dispose the Sultan in his favour so long as he pursues the wise and prudent course which he has hitherto followed'.[27] By September Reade was reporting that the public slave market in Tunis (at Suq al-Barka, where 20–30 blacks, mostly women, had been exposed for sale in a wooden pen) had been closed and demolished – 'the poor slaves are almost frantic with joy'.[28] As Consul Reade later commented in a despatch to Constantinople, 'The Bey has actually thrown himself into the arms of England.'[29] By April 1842 all slave imports into Tunisia by land and sea had been forbidden;

any imported slave was automatically free, as were children born of slaves. The reality was of course rather different, and a clandestine traffic and secret slavery continued in most of unpoliced Tunisia for many more decades.

This striking diplomatic success was in marked contrast with Consul Warrington's prolonged failure to achieve any such results in the very different political, economic and social milieu of neighbouring Tripoli. It reflected the rather unusual conditions in Tunis. Unlike the other Barbary states, this small regency had no deep Saharan hinterland of its own, and few direct connections with the main slave-exporting regions of Sudan. Tunis was never a large slave market (Austen estimates nineteenth-century yearly slave arrivals at 600); most were imported via Ghadames, or by sea from Tripoli.[30] Despite the strong local opposition the Bey claimed his measures had aroused,[31] he was in fact far better able to outface it than were other contemporary Maghrebi rulers. And the measures he decreed, while no doubt effective in Tunis itself and other towns, were largely ignored in the unruly hinterland, where slavery and a small-scale slave trade lasted until the late nineteenth century. Consul Reade was either ill-informed or naive when he reported to London in 1845, 'There is no instance of any slave having been introduced into this Regency from the interior of Africa since the Bey first promulgated his regulations [nearly four years earlier].'[32]

Nevertheless, Tunisian abolition, together with similar French measures in Algeria in the late 1840s, did upset the slave-trading patterns of the north-central Sahara, with the ancient entrepot of Ghadames worst hit. But in Tripoli to one side and in Morocco to the other, the trade was still positively encouraged, and both those markets took over some of the slave traffic that could no longer flow freely to Tunis or Algiers.

By the 1840s the French in Algeria had a contradictory policy of trying to draw the trade of inner Africa to their new possession, while making the necessary gestures towards slavery and slave trade abolition. These two objectives were then incompatible because trans-Saharan trade needed the slaving element that generated the large profits that alone justified the whole difficult and hazardous business. As in Tunis, in Algiers itself the demand for slaves was not large: Austen has calculated average imports throughout the nineteenth century (presumably despite mid-century French prohibitions) at only 500 slaves/year.[33] But despite official French disapproval, slavery and the slave trade endured in Algerian territories, both within and beyond French control, until the end of the century. Indeed, the many disruptions caused to Saharan society, communications and economy by the long French conquest (1830–1901), and the closure of the Tunis and Algiers slave markets, simply meant that more slaves brought across the central Sahara were then diverted north-westwards through the Algerian Sahara, some to be sold there, and the rest to be forwarded to the Tuat oases where they were sent on to the teeming, open markets of Morocco.[34]

Morocco itself was able largely to ignore abolitionist pressures throughout the nineteenth century. Successive sultans resisted them by means that

neither the Beys of Tunis nor the Khedives of Egypt, neither the Shahanshah of Persia nor even the Sultan-Caliphs themselves, were able to use. The Moroccan sultans were apparently more adept than other contemporary potentates at keeping the European Great Powers and their unwelcome ideologies at bay: the Sharifian Empire only fell under formal Franco-Spanish protection as late as 1912. And for over 40 years (1844–85) the same British Consul General, Sir John Drummond Hay, after early and fruitless attempts, simply declined to put any effective abolitionist pressure on the successive sultans to whom he was accredited. For he believed that he served British interests best by adopting a diffident approach to such sensitive issues.

Slavery and the slave trade, and certainly all statistical information, were never easy matters on which to report and act, particularly in a closed, traditional society. Hay never knew how many slaves there were in Morocco, nor how many the Saharan traders delivered every year to local markets; like his colleagues and contemporaries, he could only make ill-informed guesses. Even a modern authority, Jean-Louis Miège, has no clear idea of the size of Morocco's slave population in the first half of the nineteenth century: estimates he quotes vary between 40,000 and 120,000. As for slave imports, they could be anything from 500 to 3,500–4,000/year.[35] Even slave imports of 4,000/year do not seem large enough to maintain a slave pool of 40,000, let alone one of 120,000, if it is accepted that this essentially *replacement* trade had to provide up to 15 per cent of the existing slave population every year just to maintain numbers constantly eroded by death and manumission. Such a replacement rate suggests that Morocco needed to keep on importing slaves across the Sahara at a rate of 6,000/year, at the very least.

Pressed by the Foreign Office in 1841 to provide information and numbers on slavery and the slave trade, Consul Hay could only lament (as so many of his predecessors and successors in such posts have done), 'How difficult it is to obtain authoritative information in Morocco on any subject … ' He added that 'the slaves in this country are not numerous and … are kindly treated by their masters'. He was to use similar arguments throughout his time in Morocco: He added that there had been no re-export of slaves since 1818 when 500 had been shipped to Algiers to form the bodyguard of the ruling Dey.[36] The Consul also had a brief correspondence with the Sultan himself, Mulay Abd-al-Rahman, which confirmed the unchanging position and mind-set of such authorities when invited to justify slavery and the trade that supplied it. Hay simply asked the Sultan whether there were any laws 'regulating, restricting or preventing the traffic in slaves'. He had his answer within a fortnight:

> … Be it known to you that the Traffic in Slaves is a matter on which all Sects and Nations have agreed from the time of the sons of Adam … up to this day; and we are not aware of its being prohibited by the laws of any Sect, and no one need ask this question, the same being manifest to

> both high and low and requires no more demonstration than the light of day.[37]

Hay told the Foreign Secretary he considered the Sultan's reply 'far from satisfactory', and he wrote again, suggesting that Mulay Abd-al-Rahman had 'not clearly apprehended' the question. When it came within a few days, the reply cited Muslim precedent and practice 'which would allow no innovation'.[38] This reply may not have pleased the Foreign Office, but it took pressure off Hay for his failure to produce the results Consul Reade had achieved in Tunis; it also meant that he did not need to keep pressing an issue that seemed likely in the long run only to harm his carefully cultivated relations with the Sultan.

Mulay Abd-al-Rahman next faced the abolitionist assault of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in the person of its North African representative, James Richardson. He arrived in Morocco in December 1843 armed with a petition drafted by the committee of the BFASS and signed by the leading abolitionist of the day, Thomas Clarkson. In February 1844 Richardson reached the southern port of Mogador where he intended to march inland to Marrakesh and lay the petition before the Sultan himself. This document called on Mulay Abd-al-Rahman generously to liberate 'the whole of your negro subjects and [break] from their necks the cruel yoke of slavery' – he was in effect being asked to give them equal civic rights with his other subjects.[39] Although Richardson had the support of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, Consul Hay made it quite clear that, following his abortive correspondence with the Sultan, he seemed to be barred from any further reference to the subject of abolition, and he wanted nothing to do with Richardson's mission.[40] Richardson, who had no illusions about the difficulties of what he was trying to do, was thus denied local British backing, and he found the Vice Consul in Mogador quite hostile. Indeed, by the time Richardson landed there, the Sultan had already forbidden his planned visit to Marrakesh, had let it be known that he would not receive the petition, and had ordered Richardson out of the country.[41] By April Hay was writing to Aberdeen to complain of Richardson's 'untoward conduct' and his 'indiscretion and troublesome disposition'.[42] These were harsh words about a man who was to become one of the greatest Saharan travellers and an influential abolitionist (see Chapter 7).

If Consul Hay and his colleagues needed more evidence of deep Moroccan hostility towards British abolitionist pressure on slavery and the slave trade, a reminder came two years later from the Sultan's minister, Ben Driss. He wrote in the firmest terms to the Consul to reject such pressure: 'According to our treaties with your government, we have entire freedom in our own internal commerce and we can trade in any article whatsoever.'[43] The abolitionist cause might by then be pushing at an open door in Tunisia; it would in due time have doors reluctantly opened to its pressures in Turkey, and so in Tripoli and in the Middle East; and later still in Egypt. But in

Morocco the door was firmly shut and more or less remained shut for many more decades.

One of the great constraints on Muslim abolition, as outlined in 1838 by the ruler of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, was that 'the abolition of slavery could not take place in any [Muslim] country unless by very slow degrees … an intention to abolish slavery would injure [the ruler] in the eyes of [Muslims] in every part'.[44] Yet by the late 1840s, with Lord Palmerston back in the Foreign Office, the conditions for more effective abolitionist pressure on Turkey, Tripoli, Egypt and other slave-dealing and slave-owning societies were falling into place.

6 The slave trade through Murzuk

> To be moved to compassion towards them, one must be an eye-witness, as I am, and see in what state these wretched slaves do arrive from the Interior.
>
> British Vice Consul, Murzuk, Giambattista Gagliuffi

The oasis of Murzuk was for centuries the great reception-centre and market for slaves crossing the mid-Sahara. As late as the 1850s, it was still served by three of the main slaving roads out of Black Africa, drawing caravans from as far west as the Niger Bend markets and from as far east as the Sultanate of Wadai. Murzuk in turn offered open roads northwards to the slaving ports of Tripoli and Misurata and, through Augila oasis, either to Benghazi or onwards through the Western Desert to the swarming slave markets of Egypt.

Upheavals across the Sahara and Sudan from the beginning of the nineteenth century – religious, political, military, economic, demographic, social and even climatic – influenced patterns of slave-making, marketing and trading in ways that, on balance, seem to have worked in Murzuk's favour. In the closing years of Karamanli rule in Tripoli (the early 1830s), the Fezzan and its trade were often cut off from coastal markets by the long-running rebellion of the Awlad Slaiman. This large tribe, with allied groups from south-east Tripolitania, the Sirtica of north-central Libya, and northern Fezzan, continued their revolt after the Turks overthrew the semi-independent Karamanli regime in 1835 and re-established direct rule from Constantinople. The Turks finally crushed the Awlad Slaiman revolt in 1842, when some remnants and their tribal allies sought exile as freebooting trouble-makers and slavers on the far side of the desert, in Kanem. With the Turks controlling Murzuk, if little else in Fezzan, the town by 1842–43 seemed well placed to resume its traditional domination of the central Saharan slave traffic. The abolition in the 1840s of slavery and slave-trading, first in Tunis and then in French Algiers (excluding their unruly desert hinterlands), harmed Ghadames rather than Murzuk. For both in Fezzan and in Tripoli the new Turkish administration positively encouraged slavery and the slave trade as essential to local and imperial economic and social wellbeing.

Murzuk is said to have been founded in the early sixteenth century by the first ruler of the Awlad Mohammed dynasty that ruled Fezzan until 1811. The town's most notable features – the massive, mud-walled castle (*qasr*), on the western side, the substantial defensive walls, and the broad central street (*dendal*) – were said to date from Murzuk's origins.[1] The French traveller Henri Duveyrier, who stayed there in 1861, described the *dendal* as '… a sort of broad boulevard … provided with a double row of shops … all the side-streets lead into the *dendal* which divides the town into separate quarters.'[2] The *dendal* was also noted for its role as the main public slave market where the common trade slaves were put up for sale; those of high value being discreetly sold off in private transactions.

Despite its importance, Murzuk was a small place, more a large village than a town. In the 1820s Major Dixon Denham estimated its population at 5,000. But by mid-century the whole southern quarter within the walls had been abandoned and the Prussian traveller Heinrich Barth in 1850 found the town still too large for its estimated 2,800 people.[3]

Outsiders rightly feared the general unhealthiness of the place. This was partly the fault of the very trying climate, especially in high summer, but was mostly due to the waterlogged salt-pans outside the walls. Gustav Nachtigal, who was there in 1869, condemned 'the folly of the founders of the town in choosing to settle it in an area of extensive salt marshes … it must have required deliberate consideration to discover the most unfavourable, the most unhealthy locality.'[4] Other health hazards were the large cemeteries of very shallow graves outside the town walls, the habit of hardly burying dead slaves at all, and of dumping animal carcasses in the open. Socially, Murzuk had little to recommend it either, and in 1798 Friedrich Hornemann described it, after the main caravan had left, as 'the most disinteresting town I ever saw'. In 1846 James Richardson condemned it as 'a sink of vice and disease … overhung with an ever forbidding sky of dull red haziness'.[5]

Slaves in the nineteenth century reached Murzuk by three main roads from Sudan. By far the most important, as always, was the direct road northwards from Lake Chad, at about 1,000 miles in length, the shortest and probably the easiest between Black Africa and the Mediterranean. This dreary but well-travelled route gave traders direct access to the Murzuk market from two of the main Sudanese entrepots, Kanem and Bornu; it also provided the Hausa states further to the west with two more northern outlets for slaves. One of these led from Kano to the Tripoli road's terminus at the Bornu capital, Kuka, west of Lake Chad, while the other met the main road further north, at Bilma in the Kawar oases.[6]

The Lake Chad–Tripoli road in effect marked the main ethnic and linguistic divide between the eastern and western Sahara, given deeper physical expression by the Tenéré Sand Sea. The Tenéré is not impassable even by large caravans, but it has always been a boundary between peoples, the 'white' Berber-speaking Tuareg confederations to the west and the black (but not negro) Tebu and related peoples speaking 'central Saharan' dialects

to the east.[7] The use of the same main road by these two mutually hostile peoples in all their ramifications, and also by Tripolitanian Arabs and others, helped to give it a long, cosmopolitan pre-eminence. But those using it were always vulnerable to localised or more general strife including (when Bornu was unable to keep order so far north) breakdowns of security such as halted much of its general traffic at various times in the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet despite these difficulties, this central road seems still to have carried the greater part of the northbound slave traffic of the central Sahara, at least according to the reports in the 1840s and 1850s of the British Vice Consul in Murzuk, Giambattista Gagliuffi. Every year he counted the traffic, except 1846, more slaves came up from the central Sudanese entrepots by that route than by the reputedly more secure, if far longer and more difficult road, through Ghat. There is no ready explanation for this, but it may well have been that the worst mid-century predators on the Bornu road (notably the Awlad Slaiman exiles based in Kanem) were coincidentally the greatest slavers using it, and thus largely immune from interference.

Murzuk's commercial predominance in the 1840s and 1850s lay also in its access to a second Sudanese outlet, the apparently more secure and increasingly busy road leading north-eastwards from the Hausa States. This road passed through Zinder to Air and then by 'one of the worst bits of desert in the world' to Ghat. It became important when Katsina's place as one of the main southern termini of trans-Saharan trade was taken over by Kano, and North African merchants shifted their operations accordingly. But because Kano is much further south, the need for a pre-desert gathering place was met by Zinder. This was the capital of the medium-sized state of Damagaram, which emerged in mid-century as Bornu lost control of its outlying fiefs (Kanem, Borku and Baghirmi) and the Bornu road began to decline.

Damagaram was closely linked with the fortunes of the road from Kano to Agades (Air). From Agades, caravans went due northwards to Ghat under the protection first of the Kel Owi Tuareg, and then the Ajjer Tuareg confederation. At Ghat, merchants could either move goods and slaves northwards to Ghadames (as the depot for Tunisia and Tripolitania), or by the shorter road north-eastwards to Murzuk. The increasing importance of Ghat and its great winter fair in the mid-nineteenth century Saharan trade system was due to its links with Agades, Damagaram and the Hausa States (Kano and Sokoto), as well as the relatively efficient protection and management of caravans across the west-central Sahara by the Tuareg and by the Sultans of Damagaram.[8] Ghat also prospered because it offered all the facilities of a Saharan entrepot: it had the necessary Tuareg connections and sub-Saharan links and, until its occupation by the Turks in 1875, it was untaxed and unregulated by any outside power. But Tebu traders operating out of Zinder avoided what was for them the hostile Tuareg road to Ghat, as far as they could, by turning eastwards at Agades and making for the relative safety of Kawar, where they linked up with the main road from Lake Chad to Murzuk.[9]

Finally, Murzuk was served by a third Sudanese outlet, the long, roundabout and little-used route across the southern Sahara from the Sultanate of Wadai (now in eastern Chad) that eventually reached Fezzan through the Tibesti uplands. This road, which put cruel strains on slave caravans, was rarely used by slavers during Gagliuffi's years at Murzuk. It fell into disuse after the full development of the direct road from Wadai to Benghazi under the impetus of Sultan Ali (1858–74) and the Sanusi confraternity, by then established in Cyrenaica and the eastern Sahara.[10]

All such routes were not necessarily fixed and invariable, and it has been suggested that they should be regarded as 'capillaries rather than arteries … a network, not a line'. The movement of slaves, like any other commodity, was subject to the trading variables of individual merchants and the trans-Saharan traffic has thus been compared to a seepage of people, rather than a flow.[11] There was indeed such a seepage of slaves into the Sahara in the nineteenth century, and no doubt also in earlier times. Their movement can perhaps best be likened to a series of leaks from the larger flow of slaves across the desert by generally well-defined, well-used and at least semi-permanent main channels.

Murzuk was both an entrepot and a terminus of trans-Saharan trade. By the mid-nineteenth century it was not, as Ghadames still was, the emporium of a class of merchant-venturers whose enterprise spread across northern Africa. Ghadames was probably unique in that respect, while Murzuk was largely a centre of attraction and dispersion for traders from all over the central Sahara and Sudan. Those from Sokna in the Giofra oases of northern Fezzan were particularly well represented through their close association with the Awlad Slaiman tribe; indeed, Sokna merchants were the main carriers between Fezzan and the Mediterranean coast. Some merchants may have had imposing second homes at Murzuk, but their loyalties and their capital were firmly lodged elsewhere – in Tripoli, Sokna, Hon, Augila, Bilma (Kawar), Air and even Bornu. According to Heinrich Barth in the 1850s, Murzuk was 'rather the thoroughfare than the seat of a considerable commerce' and was 'usually in great want of money, the foreign merchants when they have sold their merchandise carrying away its price in specie'.[12] And, he added, 'few of the principal merchants of the place are natives'.

Murzuk was a terminus in the sense that caravans halted and disbanded there. Depending on timing and circumstances, any traveller intending to continue his journey southwards might have to wait weeks, months or even longer for a suitable caravan to assemble. In 1798–99 Friedrich Hornemann's departure for the Sudan was delayed for over a year while he waited for a caravan. The British Bornu mission had the same trouble for months in 1822. And in 1846 the anti-slavery agent, James Richardson, had entirely to abandon his planned onward journey from Murzuk, largely for the same reason. According to Richardson, reporting from Murzuk in 1850 as leader of the Central African Mission, one large general caravan arrived in Fezzan from Bornu every winter, with 'small bodies of merchants' travelling the

desert during the rest of the year. The arrival of the winter caravan, plus the incoming *haj* caravan bringing pilgrims via the Tuat oases from the western Maghreb and West Africa, marked the start of the great winter fair. According to Richardson, it normally ran from October to January, attracting small trading caravans from all over the Sahara 'and the transactions there taking place involve a capital of from 40 to 60,000 dollars' (£8,000–£12,000). Main exports were slaves and senna and, for the first time in 1849–50, ivory from Bornu.[13] Edvard Vogel, who was in Murzuk with Richardson, put the yearly trade of the oasis at £21,000, 'the slave trade forming seven-eighths of the whole'.[14]

The winter fair lasted so long because even simple transactions could take days to conclude. This was because most business was done by barter rather than for cash, and also because slaves who had just trekked two-thirds of the way across the Sahara from the Sudan needed to rest and recover when they reached Murzuk. They were hardly marketable goods on arrival: they were naked, living skeletons, traumatised by their recent experiences. Many died soon after reaching the bounty of Fezzan. The survivors were fattened up, clothed, oiled, groomed for market and were taught the few words of Arabic that would raise their sale value.

Caravans also disbanded at Murzuk because, unlike slaves, camels were not expected to make the full Saharan journey; the strains on them of such a crossing were simply too great. The 'Arabian' camel of Fezzan was notably different from that of the central and southern deserts herded by the Tuareg and Tebu; it was a better load-carrier, but there were fewer of them. Suitable animals to make up a big southbound caravan out of Murzuk had to be rounded up and brought in from several distant pastures, depending on the caravan's intended route and destination. They came from the Fezzanese wadis and other watered depressions, but particularly from the Wadi Shatti of north-east Fezzan, from Tuareg country to the south-west, and from Tebu country to the south.

Anyone who lived in Murzuk during most of the nineteenth century soon became aware of its central role in the Saharan slaving system. Apart, perhaps, from some European Turkish officials who survived their exile in that deadly environment, the first long-term European resident was the British Vice Consul, Giambattista Gagliuffi, who took up the post in 1843.[15] He lived in the main street, the *dendal*, where from his very doorstep he could observe the number of slaves, their physical condition, sales and prices in the neighbouring street market.[16] Within weeks of his arrival at Murzuk he was reporting what he had already seen:

> To be moved to compassion towards them, one must be an eye-witness, as I am, and see in what state these wretched slaves do arrive from the Interior; certainly they would move to pity even a slave. They are naked, and only a small piece of rag, or a skin, covers their genitals.[17]

This was one of Gagliuffi's few descriptive passages. He was a businessman, not a man of letters, and he gave no more than he had been asked, plain facts and simple figures. Nor did he give any separate estimate of *private* sales of high-quality, expensive slaves. These were usually offered to selected clients behind the closed doors of merchants' houses, but Gagliuffi must have been aware of them.[18] There were few such sales compared with the numbers of cheap trade slaves bought and sold in the street market, and their overall numbers probably made little difference to Gagliuffi's returns of the total of people processed through Murzuk in any one year. But his apparent failure to include the higher prices of private slave sales may well have distorted his calculations of the whole value of Murzuk's yearly business.

Most slaves who passed through Murzuk in the Vice Consul's first year there, 1843, seem to have arrived in one large caravan in November. According to Gagliuffi's first statistical despatch, the number reaching Murzuk between 1st April and 31st December was 1,600 'to whom are to be added about 200 more, who passed as servants and concubines, and who at last were sold' (see Table 6.1)[19] This nine-month statistical year was clearly exceptional. According to Gagliuffi's figures for the rest of the 1840s, more slaves reached Murzuk during those nine months than in any full year until the 1850s. During 1843–49 the average yearly import was 1,397 slaves. It may have been that the sudden influx of 1843, and particularly the arrival of one

Table 6.1 Slaves arrivals in Murzuk, 1843–1854

Year	*Bornu*	*Wadai*	*'Sudan' (Hausa)*	*Via Ghat*	*Totals*
1843[a]	1,500	22	246	32	1,800 (2,000)[b]
1844	618	0[c]	316	260	1,509[d]
1845	576	0	377	152	1,105[e]
1846	494	0	561	20	1,075
1847	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,281
1848	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,257
1849[f]	975	n/a	489	86	1,550
1850[g]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1851	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1852	1,919	0	341	198	2,458
1853	1,914	0	553	142	2,609
1854	1,766	221	662	251	2,900

Notes

a 1 April–31 December.

b '… to whom are to be added about 200 more who passed as servants and concubines and who at last were sold'. FO 84/540, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 27th January 1844.

c 0, Gagliuffi counted no slaves that year.

d Plus 'remaining in Katrun at the end of the year 1843 and brought here since that time: 315'. FO 84/598, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 4th January 1845.

e Figures for the years 1843–45 given in Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. II, p. 323 and quoting Gagliuffi are not wholly accurate.

f The year one caravan of 1,600 slaves died on the Lake Chad–Murzuk road.

g Gagliuffi was not in Murzuk in the winter of 1850–51 and compiled no statistics for 1850.

Table 6.2 Slaves arrivals in Murzuk in 1849

Origin	*Number*	*Died on the way*	*Died after arrival*	*Remarks*
Soudan	489	39	18	Cause of mortality:
Ghat	86	n/a	n/a	disease, fatigue
Bornu	658	195	65	and want of proper
Bornu[a]	317	600	15	food and water
Totals	1,550	834[b]	98	

Source: FO 84/815, Crowe to Palmerston, 20th January 1850.

Notes
Total of 2,384 brought away from their country, of whom 834 died on the road.
a Presumably two separate caravans from Bornu.
b These were in addition to the entire caravan of 1600 slaves from Bornu who died of thirst in August 1849.

large caravan from Bornu in November, was due to traders, after their business had been spoiled by years of turmoil in Fezzan and on the southern roads, quickly taking advantage of what they hoped would be more settled conditions. These seemed to be promised by the previous year's defeat and exile of the Awlad Slaiman and their allies, and by the definite establishment of Ottoman government in Murzuk. The 1844 slave traffic through the oasis was again higher than the average for the decade, and only settled down to what, considering all the difficulties and uncertainties of the trade, was a remarkably steady yearly rate of 1,000–1,250 arrivals up to the disastrous year of 1849 (see Table 6.2).

Most slaves, Gagliuffi learned, were from 'savage countries'; they were 'idolators' and 'subjects of Vadai, Darfur, Baghirmi, Mandara, Bornu, Nife [Nupe] and many other places of the Sudan that have some idea of the Mohammedan religion'.[20] In other words, slaves for the Murzuk market were drawn from an extraordinarily wide extent of sub-Saharan Africa. In modern terms, they came from as far apart as the western Sudan Republic (Darfur) and the middle of Nigeria (Nupe), a spread of over 1,500 miles. But the main source of supply was simply 'Bornu'. This vaguely defined political entity was not necessarily the homeland of many of the slaves traded on the Murzuk market; most were drawn to the marshalling centres listed by Gagliuffi from remoter, outlying countries. Those who came through Bornu were concentrated for the trans-Saharan trek at the great slave entrepot at Kuka (Kukawa), west of Lake Chad. Their northward route lay, of course, along the ancient road that offered the most direct and easy access to Fezzan and Tripoli.

Throughout Gagliuffi's years at Murzuk, this was consistently and by far the busiest of all the northbound roads across the central Sahara, carrying direct from Bornu 41 per cent of slave traffic to Murzuk in 1844 (618 out of 1,509 people) and 78 per cent in 1852 (1,919 out of 2,458). But the road was actually even busier than that. For the second main source of slaves for the

Murzuk market, as tabled by Gagliuffi, was 'Sudan', or the Hausa States. Like Bornu, these offered depots where slaves were assembled from many different sources far enough from the Atlantic slave-exporting networks for the internal and Saharan markets to exert a greater attraction, although there was no fixed boundary between the different attractions of the Atlantic and the Saharan trades. Slaves from the Hausa States seem to have reached Fezzan by trekking first to Bornu and then crossing the Sahara by the same old road from Lake Chad that slaves from Bornu itself took. It has been suggested that at mid-century about 1,000 slaves were moved eastwards from the Hausa emirates to Bornu every year, although it is not clear from this source how many of these may have entered the Saharan trade system there, and eventually reached Murzuk.[21] But the relative reliability of this route is reflected in Gagliuffi's yearly returns. On average, about one-quarter of the blacks arriving in Murzuk were drawn from Hausaland along the Bornu road. However, there were great variations in this traffic from one year to the next, a little over 12 per cent of the total in 1843 (246 out of 2,000) and over half in 1846 (561 out of 1,075). The totals of slaves brought up the Bornu road from Bornu itself, combined with those of the Hausa States as well, confirm its predominance over all other routes to Murzuk, at least in the decade when Vice Consul Gagliuffi was there to count the traffic. In one year, 1846, this road alone accounted for 97 per cent of Murzuk slave arrivals: the average was 86 per cent during Gagliuffi's years of office.

As already mentioned, slaves were also moved from the Hausa States to Murzuk by way of Air and Ghat. The length and harshness of this road can be read in the irregularity of the slave caravans that used it: in some years, over 200 slaves would be delivered by this route (notably 1844 and 1854), in others only 20 (1846).

Finally, Gagliuffi identified another supply route, the roundabout and exhausting trail from the expanding Sultanate of Wadai. Only in Gagliuffi's returns for 1843 and 1854 does Wadai make any contribution to the total of Murzuk slave deliveries (7.5 per cent in 1854). At Murzuk in December 1824 the Bornu Mission had witnessed the arrival of 'part of the Gaffle [caravan] from Wady – they were in miserable condition; they lost better than half the No. of slaves they left Wady with from hunger and cold'.[22] This traffic was all the more remarkable because Wadai was by the 1840s opening up its own much more direct, but extremely challenging slave outlet to the Mediterranean through the Kufra oases to Augila and Benghazi. In 1847, for instance, as many as 1,300 slaves, most of them young girls, arrived in Benghazi from Wadai, many more having died on the road 'exhausted by the fatigue and suffering of so long a journey'. By about 1850, the arrival of the 'great caravan' from Wadai was a recognised yearly event in Benghazi.[23]

Although incomplete, Gagliuffi's statistics record notable increases in the number of slaves taken to Murzuk along the Bornu road in 1852–54, compared with 1843–46. As he was unable to report in 1850, and the returns for 1851 are missing, it is not possible to establish when the traffic began to

increase. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to ascribe the greater activity to fears of impending Turkish abolition, to changes in the Turkish tax regime in Fezzan in the early 1850s, and to the resounding defeat of the Awlad Slaiman freebooters by the Kel Owi Tuareg in 1850, an event that restored peace and security to the Bornu road. Explaining the new tax advantages, Gagliuffi reported in a despatch of December 1853 'the trade [in slaves] increases every year because of the means by which the Ottoman government encourages it'. He wrote that up to about 1850 traders had paid 200 piastres on every slave arriving at Tripoli, but by 1853 the tax on a slave delivered all the way to Constantinople was only 150 piastres, while slaves sold at Tripoli for local use were merely taxed at 'the custom officer's discretion'. Slaves sold along the road between Fezzan and Tripoli paid only 80–100 piastres. 'These facilities,' Gagliuffi pointed out, 'cause an increase in the profit, and so [traders] prefer to bring slaves rather than merchandise subject to various illicit dues [*diritti abusivi*].' There was a tax of 4–6 per cent on ivory at Murzuk, a further 12 per cent at Tripoli, and more on other goods – 'that is, if the trader is lucky enough to dispose of them'.[24]

Gagliuffi's statistics confirm that in most years, two-thirds of the slaves traded through Murzuk were women and girls destined for domestic and/or sexual services, in accordance with the traditional practices of slave-owning Muslim households. Few were aged over 20, and many were small children. Gagliuffi usually listed females in his returns as *femminine* ('little women'). Women and girls were also more easily taken across the desert than men, and not only because they were more amenable. Physically, they seem to have withstood the journey as ably as the men and boys, while their psychological attitude to the whole experience was much more positive.[25] Men were usually shackled,[26] at least during halts, while the women (except those in the hands of Tebu dealers) were not. An Italian officer, Enrico Petragnani, who was a prisoner in Murzuk during the First World War, has a further explanation: 'Women are considered by the Tebu to be more capable of putting up with the hardships because the scanty allowances of food and water distributed on the journey are sufficient for them, but not for the men.'[27]

Saharan slave prices are rare, and often uncertain because of the difficulty in maintaining constant values or rates of exchange between one market and the next. Moreover, slave prices on the open markets of Africa and the Levant were those most usually reported by European travellers and officials, and were normally those paid for the cheaper trade slaves. These were the captives who were most likely to have been sent out of the Sudan in the first place because they were considered the least economically productive, and thus the most readily exportable.

Women were much more wanted as slaves than men. The consistently greater demand for female slaves in the Saharan trade, and particularly for young, nubile girls, was reflected in the higher prices usually paid for them at every single stage of the trade. It has been suggested that:

> the value of females increased much more sharply between childhood and adolescence, and declined much more sharply between young adulthood and later life, than did the value of males. If throughout their lives both sexes were required primarily for labour, the different rates of increase and decrease would be hard to explain. The answer, however, may be in an additionally sexually-oriented demand for young females as concubines and child-bearers.[28]

There has been much scholarly reserve on this subject, but the connections between young girl slaves' sexual availability to their owners (whether slave-dealers, slave-drivers or final masters), and the constant demand for them was clear enough. 'It is this role as sexual partner that gave women added value over that of male slaves, and yet it is the same role that occasioned their ability to take advantage of the system, gaining liberty through their fecundity in the case of concubines.'[29] It may well have been, of course, that this sexual role was even more attractive to buyers of slave girls in North Africa and the Levant, where societies were otherwise more sexually repressive than in sub-Saharan Africa. As for slave-drivers, James Richardson, after observing the Saharan slave trade at first hand in the 1840s, came to the conclusion that it would continue even if there were no profit in it, because of 'the facility which it offered Arab and Moorish merchants to indulge in sensual amours' with the slave girls in their charge.[30]

Gagliuffi recorded prices irregularly (see Table 6.3). There are none for 1843, but in 1844 he reported that males fetched between $20 and $25 each – they were 'much required for the Levant'. But females were from $35 to $75 each.[31] He recorded no prices for 1845, but by 1846 they had risen to $25–$30 for males and had fallen to $30–$65 for females, 'according to age and beauty'.[32] Gagliuffi only made regular annual returns of prices in 1852–54. In 1852, males were fetching an average of 10 guineas each ($52.50) and females £13 ($65). In 1853, the same year that Vice Consul Charles Dickson at Ghadames noted a big increase in male slave traffic there, more males than females also passed through Murzuk (1,512 against 1,097). While female prices remained steady at $65, the market was glutted with males, and their prices fell to an average of $45 each.[33] There were no apparent variations in prices of slaves from different places: Gagliuffi's figures all gave the same average result. It may have been that he simply ignored such niceties and rounded out all his figures to give consistent general averages. In actual practice, slaves from some places must have fetched more than those from others for their superior personal qualities. Hausa slaves, for instance, were generally thought the best-looking, 'especially the women, who were celebrated for their beauty all over Africa'.[34] They were also said to make the best domestics. Slaves traded through Wadai, by contrast, were not so highly valued.

For 1854 Gagliuffi reported that males passing through the Murzuk market were still just outnumbering females (1,479 to 1,421) and that prices

Table 6.3 Slaves arrivals in Murzuk in 1854

Origin	*Number*	*M*	*F*[a]	*Average (£Sterling)*	*Died in journey*	*Died in Murzuk*	*Destinations*
Bornu	1,766	950	816	21,550	15%	7%	Tripoli, Garian, Gebel, Benghazi and Egypt
Wadai	221	60	161	2,850	One	0%	
Hausa	662	285	377	7,650	5%	2%	
Ghat	251	184	67	2,770	0%	0%	
Totals	2,900	1,479	1,421	34,820			

Source: FO 84/949, Herman to Clarendon, 22nd January 1855, enclosed Gagliuffi's *Prospetto del numero di Schiavi arrivati in Mourzouk nel corso dell'anno 1854*.

Notes
a *Femminine* in Vice-Consul Gagliuffi's original table in Italian.
b These prices do not agree with Gagliuffi's estimate of an average of £10 each for males and £14 for females. The official English translation mixes up the male and female prices.

were up to $50 and $70, respectively.[35] That year the slave trade through Murzuk was worth nearly $175,000, compared with $139,300 the previous year and $147,000 in 1852, these totals being in addition to the 'legitimate' but much smaller transit trade in such goods as ivory, feathers and gold dust.[36] The slave trade through Murzuk was still the most valuable of all the trade through the Regency of Tripoli. And it may be safely assumed that it was even more valuable because, as already mentioned, Gagliuffi's yearly returns omit all reference to sales of higher-class, higher-priced slaves through private transactions in Murzuk. There is no indication of the contribution such bargains may have made to the overall value of the trade.

What happened to slaves after their sale and dispersal at Murzuk? Apart from those who were bought locally, most faced a further Saharan trek: fairly easy to Tripoli, harder to Benghazi, and even worse to Egypt. Many of those taken to Tripoli or Benghazi were eventually shipped on a Mediterranean 'middle passage' to other parts of the Ottoman Empire. A few were sold to what Gagliuffi merely called 'Gebel', presumably the settled, largely Berber farming communities of the Gebel Nefusah and Gebel Gharbi or north-west Tripolitania. In his yearly report for 1844, he identified another destination: 'Both males and females were forwarded to Tuat, from whence they are sent to Morocco, and some to Algeria'.[37] It is significant that slaves were already being moved from Murzuk to the distant western Maghreb through the oasis-complex of Tuat, long considered Moroccan but eventually annexed by France to Algeria. Diversion of slaves from Fezzan to Tuat became common in the 1850s, after abolition measures disrupted traffic through Tunis and Algiers, and when the road north-eastwards from Timbuctu became insecure.

It has been claimed that most of the slaves moved north went not across the Sahara, but into it.[38] This may have been true of the western roads, but

was not necessarily the case in the central desert in the nineteenth century. The totals of Vice Consul Gagliuffi's import statistics for Murzuk, as well as those compiled at the British Vice Consulate in Ghadames for some years in the 1850s, and an allowance for those imported by routes not watched by British consular officials, do not support this claim when it is set against import statistics for Tripoli, Benghazi and Misurata. But it does indeed seem to have been the case that the increased prosperity of various Saharan communities, both nomadic and settled, from time to time during the nineteenth century was reflected in the greater demand for servile labour bought from passing caravans.

British consular reports are silent on this point. They made no record of slave sales to final owners at markets such as Murzuk and Ghadames. Further along the road, there are still no reliable indications of how many more slaves may have been removed from the trade by sale to final owners between the mid-Saharan entrepots and the Mediterranean coast. Simple subtraction of exports from imports does not tell how many of the 'missing' slaves may have died on the road, were sold on the way to the coast, or were shipped overseas from one of the several small, unwatched anchorages along the coasts of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

Vice Consul Gagliuffi's observations at Murzuk were partly expanded by James Richardson, who was there twice during long Saharan journeys for the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (1845–46 and 1850–51).[39] Although Richardson misquoted some of the statistics Gagliuffi gave him, he is still the best contemporary source for slave prices at successive markets on the long land and sea journey between Kano in Hausaland and the great Ottoman cities of Smyrna and Constantinople. He then shows where the biggest slaving profits were to be made.[40]

Richardson's prices for Kano in 1851 (see Table 6.4) distinguish five categories of male slaves and six female (in terms revealing clear Arab influence), determined according to physical age characteristics. Richardson's figures show that higher prices were paid for girls and women at all stages of their development up to adulthood, pubescent girls being priced nearly three times higher than boys of the same age. Only in late-middle and old age did men fetch as much (or as little) as old women. For the purposes of his trade statistics, Richardson took as his standard female trade slave the *Dabukia* and for the male the *Morhag*. His figures show that the largest gross profit on trading such slaves of both sexes between the Hausa States and Smyrna and Constantinople was to be made on the most difficult stage, between Kano or Zinder (where there were, inexplicably, no differences in price) and Murzuk (see Table 6.5). A female slave bought for $32 at Kano could be sold in Murzuk for $85, a gross profit of $53. By contrast, males bought for only $10–$12 at Kano realised a gross profit of up to $30 in Murzuk.

But the trade in men and boys was more hazardous. While the greatest profit on both sexes was made on the longest and most difficult stage between the Sudanese markets and Murzuk, the male trade slaves were much more

Table 6.4 Slave prices and categories, Kano, 1851

Male			*Female*		
Type	*Description*	*Price ($[a])*	*Type*	*Description*	*Price($[a])*
Garzab	Those who have a beard	4–5	Ajouza	Old woman	4
—	—		Shamalia	With breasts hanging down	8
Morhag	With beard beginning	12	Dabukia	With breasts plump	32
Sabaai	Without beard	14	Farakh	With little breasts	40
Sadasi	Grown children	12	Sadasia	Girls smaller	16
Hhamsi	Children	8	Hhamsia	Children	12

Sources: Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission*, Vol. II, pp. 202–3; Tambo, 'The Sokoto Caliphate', Appendix.

Note
a Richardson's prices are in cowries; the $ conversion is by Tambo.

Table 6.5 Slave prices, Kano–Constantinople, 1851

Place	*Male (Morhag) $[a]*	*Female (Dabukia) $[a]*
Kano	10–12	32
Zinder	Little change	A little more or the same
Murzuk	40	85
Tripoli	60–65	100
Smyrna and Constantinople	90–100	130

Source: Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission*, Vol. II, pp. 202–3; Tambo, 'The Sokoto Caliphate', Appendix.

Note
a Richardson's prices are in cowries; the $ conversion is by Tambo.

difficult to move across the desert, and demand for them in Saharan and North African markets was uncertain. The high gross profits to be made on this main southern desert stage, especially for females, reflected realistically the difficulties of the journey. Gagliuffi's figures suggest that deaths on all routes were not as high as the 20 per cent average proposed as a reliable figure by Ralph Austen, but occasional disasters on the road did raise the statistical average of losses. Then such expenses as the hire of camels to carry slaves' food and water, the cost of whips, manacles, branding-irons, water-skins, food, extra personnel, taxes and other 'dues' en route, all had to be deducted from the gross profits.

Merchants who herded slaves from Murzuk to Tripoli could still (according to Richardson's figures) expect to make further gross profits of $20–$25 each on male slaves and $15 each on females. This, of course, was the shortest and

easiest of the Saharan stages, where losses and expenses were correspondingly lower. Finally, Richardson's figures suggest that further gross profits of $25–$40 could be made on male slaves and $30 on females shipped across the Mediterranean to the great imperial cities of Smyrna and Constantinople. The voyage was plainly the easiest stage of all, but disasters could still occur, and the cost of the slaves' sea passage, plus government taxes, cut into profits. But at both Smyrna and Constantinople the gross profit on males was around $90 on an initial outlay of $10–$12 in Kano, for females around $100 on an initial outlay of $30. While the greatest proportional gross profit for both sexes was gained on the longest and most difficult stage between the Sudanese markets and Fezzan, the trade in males became relatively more profitable the further they were moved from central Africa.

Net profits tell a rather different story. These are also hard to estimate, not least because of scanty and conflicting information. But, again according to Richardson, the Tuareg charged less than $7/head to take slaves from Hausaland to Ghat.[41] The charge up to Murzuk might have been another dollar or two. Further travel expenses, successive government taxes and unofficial 'dues', as well as the costs of the slaves' upkeep and decent presentation at markets up to their final point of sale, may have worked out as suggested in Table 6.6 (but with no allowance for death or other loss on the road). Because the *per capita* expenses of moving slaves across the Sahara and the Mediterranean, and the taxes on them, were nearly the same for both sexes, the trade in females earned higher net profits than the trade in males, at least according to Richardson's mid-century figures. On the trade between Hausaland and Constantinople, net profits were 60 per cent of gross profits for males, but nearly 70 per cent for females.

* * *

Vice Consul Gagliuffi was more meticulous in recording the deaths of slaves on the road and after their arrival at Murzuk than the prices paid for them there. His figures show that a far larger proportion of people from Bornu died every year on the road than did those taken over the same route from the Hausa States, or on the road through Ghat, or even on the road from Wadai. Yet the Bornu road was shorter than the others, and offered easier

Table 6.6 Expenses of moving slaves from Hausa to Constantinople ($/head)

From	*Travel*	*Taxes*	*Total*
Hausaland to Murzuk	8	3	11
Murzuk to Tripoli	4	10	14
Tripoli to Constantinople	4	10	14
Totals	16	23	39

Sources: FO 101/16, James Richardson report, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert*, 11th May 1846; FO 160/16, Herman to Ambassador, Constantinople, Stratford de Redcliffe, 21st May 1853; FO 84/919, Herman to Clarendon, 22nd May 1853.

travelling conditions for slaves who, unless they were very young or special, walked all the way to Fezzan. In a particularly bad year, such as 1849, many more people from Bornu died on the road than ever reached Murzuk. Even in an average year such as 1854, some 15 per cent of slaves in the Bornu caravans died, compared with 5 per cent of those taken by the same road from the Hausa States, one death only on the difficult road from Wadai, and none at all among the slaves brought through Ghat (see Table 6.3).

In his first despatch on the subject of slave deaths, Gagliuffi identified the cause of these differences as, quite simply, the kind of treatment meted out by the various slave-driving peoples of the central Sahara. Reporting in 1844 on slave deaths on the road from Lake Chad, he said:

> The mortality of those who come from Bornu escorted by the Tibonis [Tebu] and Arabs of that region is from 20 to 50 per cent according to the season; of those who come from Soudan [Hausaland] under the conduct of the Tuaricks [it] is from 5 to 10 per cent; these latter treat with more humanity these unhappy men: they clothe them, feed them well, and do not ill use them, and travel by short journeys. In short, on the arrival of a caravan from Soudan, the poor wretches are seen covered and in a good state – those who arrive from Bornu, on the contrary, are in a deplorable condition, naked, exhausted by fatigue, hungry and horribly maltreated; they are forced to walk, and whipped. For these reasons the mortality is greater – here they die at the rate of 3 or 4 per cent.[42]

For the following year, 1844, he again reported, 'The mortality of those brought [by the] Tebus was very great, owing to maltreatment and want of food'.[43] Causes of death were 'dysentery, fever, smallpox, and gross ill-usage'. In 1847 smallpox struck one caravan: 'About 160 men had died on the way [to Murzuk], the smallpox having broken out among them soon after they had left Bornu'.[44]

Surprisingly, Gagliuffi never mentions cold as a separate killer of slaves in the Sahara. While caravan leaders tried to avoid travel in high summer, any delay after the onset of cooler weather might result in a caravan crossing the desert in winter, with the risk of naked blacks dying in droves in the frigid nights. One caravan from Wadai to Benghazi in the spring of 1850 lost one-quarter of its 1,600 slaves and 'upward of 2,000 camels' from cold and fatigue.[45] Vice Consul Dickson in Ghadames explained that slave deaths from cold 'may be easily accounted for by the sudden transition from the tropics to the bleak desert region … The winter before last [1849–50] sixteen of these unhappy creatures, principally children, died in the course of one night between Ghat and this place.'[46]

Not until his his annual report of 1852 did Gagliuffi fully distinguish between the treatment of caravan slaves by the Tebu and Tuareg respectively. On the Bornu road, he explained, more died because the Tebu slave-drivers only allowed one camel-load of provisions for every ten slaves 'which obliges

them to precipitate their journey'. Each slave driven by the Tebu, female as well as male, was 'chained by the neck and has a hand bound to the chain by a leather thong and is compelled to carry on his head a bundle weighing 20 pounds'. But the slaves from the Hausa States suffered less 'as the Tuaricks who conduct them travel only five hours a day and allow every four slaves a camel-load of provisions. They do not carry any weight on their heads.'[47] The implication is that slaves in the Tuareg caravans could expect two-and-a-half times more to eat and drink than those the Tebu drove. The Tebu were notorious throughout northern Africa as brutal slave-drivers and pitiless slave-owners. James Richardson found that they treated their slaves 'with the greatest barbarity'. The Tebu of Tibesti, he learned, were the worst slave-dealers of all central Africa, being the 'most brutal and licentious'. 'Children of four to five years of age are violated and [the Tebus'] usual brutal plan is to sleep with a different female slave every night until the whole are debauched and violated'.[48] The Prussian traveller Heinrich Barth found that the Tebu treated their slaves on the march 'much more cruelly than even the Arabs, making them carry all sorts of articles, especially their favourite dried fish'.[49] All the Tuareg confederations, by contrast, were reputed to treat their slaves humanely, both personal slaves and trade slaves in transit. According to James Richardson, 'The Tuareg of Air [the Kel Owi] are more mild and gentle in the treatment of the poor slaves, never laying a finger on them during their long and weary traverse of 60 or 70 days, nor violating the women and girls'.[50] Richardson reported elsewhere that the Tebu 'bring their slaves quite naked … whilst the Touaricks always furnish them with some little clothing'.

Gagliuffi's mortality returns for the various roads to Murzuk do seem to suggest that slaves had a much better chance of arriving more alive than dead if they were *not* driven by the Tebu. It is of course easy, and probably unwise, to generalise about races and their characteristics. But it does seem that the Tebu,[51] living at the very margins of human survival in some of the most difficult Saharan environments, and themselves capable of enduring extraordinary privations, simply expected others, and especially their slaves, to do the same. According to a French expert on the Tebu, Jean Chapelle:

> The slave was extremely badly treated by the Tebu. Not only did he have to share the poverty of his owner, but he was given only just enough to eat to keep him from death, little or no clothing, and there was no hesitation in mutilating him in such a way as to prevent his escape.[52]

This essentially predatory people, lacking political, military or even religious coherence – 'the principle of freedom raised almost to the level of anarchy' – expected no help or compassion from their many hostile neighbours, and gave none in return. Indeed, Tebu traders themselves went in fear of 'the murderers of their own nation'. As they themselves might be raided and enslaved, so they raided and enslaved others. And, according to

Chapelle, 'to be sold to a Tebu was the most frightful fate that could befall the unhappy people put up for sale in the markets of Fezzan'.[53] But the Tebu do not seem to have cared that by treating their trade slaves so badly, they lost many of them on the road, and those who did reach Murzuk were usually in such a distressing state that they were quite unfit for an early sale.

The Tuareg themselves had a poor opinion of the Tebu. Francis Rodd wrote that 'it is common to hear a Tuareg say that he would be ashamed to stoop to the infamy of a Tebu'.[54] The Tuareg presented a generally more attractive character, particularly to European travellers struck by the romantic 'nobility' of the leaders of a complex social structure, and the freedoms of the women. The Tuareg were more politically and socially cohesive than the anarchic Tebu. Tuareg collective commercial organisation and security arrangements along the Saharan trails from the west and south-west to Fezzan, passing through the territories of different confederations, were more efficient and 'professional' than the extraordinarily haphazard and improvident methods of the Tebu traders. Many Tebu traded on their own account, perhaps handling only a very few slaves as part of often complex and barely profitable trading patterns extending between Sahara and Sudan.

The full contrast between Tebu and Tuareg slaving practices may be read in Vice Consul Gagliuffi's annual returns of death and survival on the Bornu road. This route was 'controlled' in the north by the Tebu; from Kawar southwards it was subject also to the rival activities of the Kel Owi Tuareg from the Air massif; and Tripolitanian Arabs represented a third interest. Yet it is misleading to suggest that Tuareg traders were always model slave-drivers, and that no Tebu ever was. Vice Consul Charles Dickson, reporting from Ghadames in 1851, recounted how, at the height of that summer, two Tuareg led a small caravan of 20 slaves from Ghat to Ghadames. These traders, he wrote, '… were so neglectful as not even to provide sufficient water … when half way on the journey … eleven of those unhappy creatures perished from thirst in one day. The rest reached here in a pitiful state.'[55] Such fatalistic negligence was apparently quite typical. It led to much bigger disasters, such as the destruction of a whole caravan of 1,600 slaves (driven by Tripolitanian Arabs and Tebu) on the road from Bornu in the summer of 1849, and the loss of a further 195 slaves on the same road later that year. The acting British Consul in Tripoli, John Reade, was not exaggerating when he described the deaths of the 1,600 as 'one of the most appalling disasters that ever took place in this quarter of the Globe connected with the Slave Traffic'.[56]

Rumours of the disaster reached Murzuk in early August, but not until mid-September did Gagliuffi piece together the details.[57] According to his not very coherent account, this unusually large caravan defied normal practice by travelling at the height of the Saharan summer in one body, rather than in separate sections at a few days' interval from each other to ease the pressure on water sources. Its leaders were apparently persuaded to leave the main road to visit the isolated and scattered encampments of the

Awlad Slaiman north of Lake Chad. These people provided the caravan with 100 camel-loads of water, enough to take it on to the next well. Gagliuffi then describes what happened on arrival there:

> They found it choked with earth. They dug at it for two nights, and for two nights it refilled itself with earth. So those who were already prostrated [with thirst] they abandoned on the spot, while others went off in search of water elsewhere. Terror, confusion and desperation overcame them all … those who could, seized a camel, slaughtered it, and drank down the blood and liquid in the guts …

Some survivors returned to the nearest Awlad Slaiman camp to seek help in recovering the goods abandoned round the well. Gagliuffi calculated the deaths as all 1,600 slaves; 3 Arab and 2 Tebu traders; 8 caravan boys; all 40 horses; and 400 camels. Other losses were 'enormous'; those on Gagliuffi's behalf included 40 camels, 24 loaded with ivory; some others with wax, horsehair and other goods; and a lion, a 'tiger' (probably a leopard), a parrot and other wild beasts.

He later reported attempts by the foreign trading community in Bornu to establish that only 600, and not 1,600, slaves had died. But he dismissed such claims: 'They are trying to reduce the number to diminish the horror'. There was yet more horror later that year: in another caravan of 853 slaves from Bornu, 195 (23 per cent) died on the road of 'disease, fatigue and want of nourishment'.[58] While Gagliuffi suggested that his losses for 1849 might put him off any further business with the interior, local merchants no doubt took theirs rather more fatalistically, regarding them as acceptable risks in an otherwise generally profitable trade.

Perhaps the most far-reaching impact of the disasters of 1849, and particularly the case of the 1,600 slaves, was on the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, who was by then a convinced abolitionist. Gagliuffi's horrific despatches reached London as Palmerston was already dealing with disturbing cases of slave-running between Tripoli and Constantinople aboard the Turkish steam frigate *Esseri Jadid.* The case was of direct concern to London because British engineers serving on the ship were technically guilty of involvement in the slave trade. These two simultaneous issues gave Palmerston cause for the strongest representations to the Sublime Porte, and enabled him to start applying the British diplomatic pressure that was to lead to real, if only partly effective, Turkish abolitionist measures in the 1850s.[59]

This, after all, was an age when a mere vice consul languishing in the middle of the Sahara might still have a direct influence on policy-making in London; Palmerston certainly read Gagliuffi's despatches himself. After the Napoleonic Wars, British government departments had started demanding systematic statistics, particularly on slavery and migration.[60] When Gagliuffi started to report, travellers' tales – 'a largely sporadic, amateur literature' –

ceased even in the central Sahara wholly to provide 'the working knowledge on which men in office shaped their opinions about the East'.[61] But how reliable were the statistics and related returns from sources such as Vice Consul Gagliuffi on which far-reaching policy decisions might be based? What, indeed, were Gagliuffi's own sources, and how reliable were they? Apart from the fact that he could count slaves outside his own house and judge their general condition and collate their public market prices almost at his own front door, he presumably had further credible, inside information from his wide range of political and business contacts throughout the central Sahara and Sudan. But his figures were not necessarily complete. Perhaps he disregarded some aspects of the trade, or considered them unimportant or outside his official brief, or he wanted to keep some of them secret.[62] Thus, as already mentioned, he made no separate mention of private sales of the few high-quality, expensive slaves processed every year through Fezzan. Nor did he report the clandestine trade by small slave caravans using lesser roads to avoid Turkish taxes and interference at Murzuk.

Yet, as far as they go, Gagliuffi's figures do at least make sense. They are plausibly consistent from one year to the next: quite surprisingly so, in view of the uncertainties and dangers of the trade. They generally bear comparison with similar figures compiled in the same years by British consular officials at Tripoli, Benghazi and elsewhere. Gagliuffi never stretches credibility, as the consuls of some other powers do, with outrageous statements and plainly unrealistic figures.[63]

In the end, Murzuk proved too unhealthy, even for Gagliuffi. Illness forced him to leave in 1854, aged 56. He went back to Tripoli, and could never be persuaded to return to Fezzan. The Murzuk post was taken over for a year by Consul Warrington's son, Frederick, who in 1855 was replaced by a Maltese, Gaetano de Fremaux. He, too, was forced out of Murzuk by ill-health in 1860. But the run of yearly slave trade reports ended when Gagliuffi left.

The inescapable conclusion must be that Gagliuffi's achievements in Murzuk, so far as they went, were ephemeral. He seems to have promoted some 'legitimate' trade; his political and business contacts were wide and impressive; and Britain's diplomatic standing was high in parts of the Sahara and Sudan during his time in Murzuk. But none of these tenuous advantages outlasted his departure. His slave trade returns may have made an impression at the Foreign Office, providing some of the basic evidence for British abolitionist pressures on Turkey, and a catalyst for eventual Turkish reform. But the end result was not the elimination of the trade in black slaves across the central, Turkish, Sahara. Rather, conditions for slaves in transit became if anything even harder, when caravans were diverted by longer, unobserved and more difficult routes to more obscure markets and outlets where demand was still brisk.

But Gagliuffi has left one invaluable memorial to his years at Murzuk – the despatches that now provide such a unique record of the central Saharan

slave trade as he saw it and counted it just as outside powers were beginning to interfere in its workings, and as it had probably existed for centuries past. He has shown that it was, after so long an existence, still very active, still profitable and, as always, still truly horrific in its casual mistreatment of its human merchandise.

7 The slave trade through Ghadames and Ghat

> Commerce is the foundation stone of the celebrity of Ghadames, whose merchants are known throughout the length and breadth of Africa.
>
> James Richardson

Unlike Murzuk, which is relatively modern, and has been only one of half a dozen historical entrepot-capitals of Fezzan over the past 2,000 years, Ghadames is ancient and unique, isolated in the northern Sahara. It was already an active trading centre when the Phoenicians were in North Africa.[1] This small oasis,[2] 'situated like an island in the ocean', has always been the south-westerly desert entrepot for Tripoli (13 days' travel away) and the southern entrepot for Tunis through Gabes (15 days). Through Ouargla it also served north-eastern Algeria, and especially Constantine. For this mere township commanded the main trans-Saharan routes via In Salah (Tuat), to the Niger Bend countries, or almost due south through Ghat and Air to the Hausa States.[3] Ghadames was as important a Saharan trade centre as Murzuk in the nineteenth century (although no longer so active in the slave trade), for it was still the home of merchant-venturers with contacts throughout northern Africa. Although embedded in the territory of the Ajjer Tuareg confederation, and practically defenceless, the oasis itself was respected as an independent entity, owing allegiance to Tripoli, but only brought to tributary order in 1810 by the ruling Pasha, Yusuf Karamanli, and again by the Ottoman Turks in 1843.

Ghadamsi merchants owed some of their success to their close and mutually beneficial working relationship with the Ajjer Tuareg, who provided the necessary guides, camels and protection for the trading caravans. Moreover, according to the traveller James Richardson, some of the Tuareg were partners with Ghadamsi merchants. These merchants were thus the essential middlemen between the northern trading centres (from Constantine in the west to Cairo in the east), and the entrepots of the western Sudan. But by the mid-nineteenth century they no longer went all the way to Sudan with their goods: Ghat or, at the furthest, Agades in Air, were the southern limits of their trading journeys. However there was still a remarkable diaspora of

Ghadamsi business people in all the main Sudanese emporia.[4] The main languages of Sudan, and especially Hausa, were commonly spoken in Ghadames itself.

At least up to the 1870s, Tripoline and Ghadamsi merchants cooperated in financing desert trade, with business south of Ghat operating largely on Ghadamsi capital. 'A central feature of the Ghadamsi trade diaspora was the common commercial culture which extended the length of the Tripoli–Kano route.'[5] As the British traveller Major Alexander Laing remarked of Ghadamsi merchants in an often-quoted passage, 'They calculate with profound nicety the expense of carriage to distant countries, duties or customs risks, trouble and the percentage that their goods will bear, and even do business by Bills or written agreements or promises'.[6]

Like other central Saharan entrepots, Ghadames was always a great centre of the black slave trade. The slave market for men and boys was traditionally held in Mulberry Square, while the women and girls were put up for sale in Little Mulberry Square, both of them hardly bigger than domestic courtyards.[7] Some idea of the size of this trade was given by foreign consuls in Tripoli in the eighteenth century (see Chapter 4). In 1789 the acting British Consul in Tunis, Robert Traill, reported that Ghadamsi merchants yearly brought 1,200 or 1,300 slaves in five or six separate caravans through the Tuareg ('the Twerkians'), re-exporting a thousand of them, nearly all women and girls, to Tunis. But, he added, 'tho' some years the quantity does not arrive to half that number', thus rightly stressing the essential irregularity of the traffic, the implication being that it was most unwise to regard one year's figures as a constant. Traill also reported that 'The Godampsis (sic) sometimes bring with them four or five castrated black boys whom they dispose of among the Principal People here at a very exorbitant rate. But when such are wanted, they are particularly commission'd from the Levant.'[8]

Other intermittent reports from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries confirm that Ghadames was indeed the main slave entrepot supplying Tunis on a regular basis. But Consul Traill's one set of figures, and the mention by the French physician, Louis Frank, in around 1810 of an annual caravan taking 1,000–1,200 slaves from Ghadames to Tunis, cannot be read as evidence of a regular yearly statistic, for reasons discussed in Chapter 4. Indeed, the necessary note of caution was also struck by a British witness who in 1814 suggested that the yearly import into Tunis from Ghadames was only 400 slaves. Ralph Austen has estimated that Tunisia as a whole was still importing slaves at an average rate of 700/year between 1800 and 1850. But if such was the case, it is not possible that so many were supplied through Ghadames, for some probably arrived every year at Tunisian ports, and especially Gabes, by sea as re-exports from Tripoli.

Later in the nineteenth century the trade through Ghadames fell off, with the result that the oasis processed notably fewer slaves than Murzuk in every one of the years for which British consular statistics are available. This was largely because the French conquest of northern Algeria in the 1830s and

1840s, and the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in Tunisia in 1841–46 and in the then limited territorial extent of French Algeria in 1848, had by the late 1840s cut demand, at least in the towns. This left Ghadamsi slavers with outlets only in unruly and unpoliced southern Tunisia and in the parts of Algeria beyond French control, as well as Ottoman Tripoli where, until the late 1850s, the slave trade was positively encouraged.[9] Thus James Richardson quoted merchant sources in Tripoli as telling him in 1850 that 'the merchants of Ghadames [who] had two thirds of their capital embarked in slaves now have only a fourth of their money engaged in this odious traffic'. He attributed the change to the closing of the Tunis slave market and to the great quantities of 'legitimate' trade-goods that were becoming available in the Sudanese entrepots,[10] thus stimulating something of a non-slave trade-boom in which Ghadamsi merchants were prominent, although not very successful in the long term.

The first known European travellers to reach Ghadames were Major Alexander Laing (September–November 1825), and then the agent of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, James Richardson, who arrived there 20 years later. Laing's description of the oasis[11] reveals nothing of the slave trade, merely noting that the slaves there were treated with much kindness, had many privileges, and could through their own labour buy their freedom, estimated at 50 dollars. Richardson stayed in Ghadames from August to November 1845, calling it 'the grand commercial depot of northern and central Africa'. He was seeking information about Saharan trade in general and the slave trade in particular, and he also wanted 'to ascertain how the negroes are procured … and inhumanely furnished to the slave dealer'.[12]

By the time Richardson arrived in Ghadames in August 1845, its ancient trading patterns had already been harmed by events in Algeria and Tunisia, and by growing insecurity on one of its main supply-lines, the road from Timbuctu to Tuat. The main thrust of trade from the western Sudan was by then from Kano to Ghat, while most of Timbuctu's business had switched to the west, and especially to the new and successful Moroccan Atlantic port of Mogador (Essaouira). The implication was that European commercial activity on the Atlantic coasts of Morocco and the western Sahara was by the mid-nineteenth century seriously disrupting the traditional trade of the western and west-central desert. Even the established route of the great spring pilgrim caravan from Fez to Mecca via Tafilalt, Tuat, Ghadames, Augila and Alexandria was judged by Richardson to have become very dangerous. But while insecurity and outside competition were harming some routes, that between Ghadames and Ghat was still quite secure, so much so that it could still be travelled by 'very small parties, or individuals, with some safety'.

According to Richardson, a large caravan usually left Ghadames in November to trade goods from Kano. At Ghat merchants met up with the northbound caravan bringing slaves, senna and ivory. He estimated that this main yearly caravan brought between 500 and 1,000 slaves, while smaller

intermediate caravans 'bring [slaves in] forties and fifties, and sometimes a couple of hundred together'. Slaves were exported to the Levant through Tripoli, where very few were then bought because 'the people [of Tripoli] have barely any money left to procure bread, much less slaves', a reflection of the distress caused by the Turkish reconquest of Tripolitania and Fezzan, and other economic and social disruptions. A few slaves were also sold from Ghadames directly to the Djerid area of southern Tunisia.[13]

During Richardson's time in Ghadames, a good adult slave was sold there for $30–$40, but some for as little as $15–$20. After paying the government tax of $10/head, '… there is not much profit for the merchant. The poor creatures, are fed, however, on barley meal and dates, and sometimes only dates, so that the expense of bringing them through the desert amounts to very little.' Indeed, Richardson added, 'it requires a negro of very good and strong constitution to perform the journey.'[14]

It was quite clear from Richardson's account that, even by the mid-1840s, the days of commercial greatness, and particularly the role in the slave trade, were ending for Ghadames. It was there that he decided: 'One thing is certain – unless I go to the first-hand traffickers in human flesh – to the heart of Africa itself, I can never get the information I require.'[15] This decision took him on to Murzuk and Ghat in 1845–46, and led him in 1850 to set out again as leader of the Central African Mission, with even more ambitious itineraries and abolitionist objectives.

The Foreign Office in London approved the opening of a vice consulate in Ghadames in 1847. Had Richardson achieved his original ambition to fill the post (supported by both Consul Hanmer Warrington in Tripoli and by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston). he might never have made his second great desert journey (1850–51) and found out as much as he did about the central Saharan slave trade. But Consul Warrington's successor in Tripoli, George Crowe, believed Richardson was quite unsuited to the post because, despite his 'zeal and energy', he was 'very deficient in judgement and discretion'.[16] Instead, the post went to Charles Hanmer Dickson, son of Dr John Dickson (who for the 30 years up to his death in 1847, was medical adviser to the Pashas of Tripoli), and a grandson on his mother's side of the late Consul Warrington (who also died 1847). Young Dickson had been brought up in Tripoli, spoke good Arabic and Turkish, and had already served in the Tripoli Consulate and in the Benghazi Vice Consulate. By the time Dickson was appointed (and Vice Consul Gagliuffi's position at Murzuk had been consolidated with the grant of a regular salary and British naturalisation), the need to keep the French out of the central Sahara was one of the main planks of local British diplomatic policy. The established concerns with the slave trade, its abolition, and the encouragement of an alternative 'legitimate' commerce, remained unchanged.

As Vice Consul Dickson found it in 1850, Ghadames was clearly not what it had once been. Heavy Turkish taxes,[17] insecurity on the roads (including even the road to Tripoli), disruptions of the slave trade by tentative European

abolitionist measures, and the diversion of some of the remaining slave traffic by small groups of freebooters, were all making difficulties for established merchants. Many families had by this time moved away to Sudan, Ghat or Tunis. In 1845 Richardson had pointed out that Turkish taxes were already forcing Ghadamsi merchants to emigrate, and as the resources of those who remained became exhausted, they would increasingly have to rely on European finance, which is exactly what did happen from the 1850s onwards.

After eight months in Ghadames, Dickson was able to report that the abolition of the slave trade in Tunis some years before 'has produced the most beneficial effect here. Numbers [of slaves] have fallen by half.' In his general report of August 1850 to Consul Crowe on the trade of the oasis, Dickson wrote: 'The average number of slaves imported here is 400 [yearly]; two thirds of which are females under 20 years of age. The males are principally children; and a few adults are occasionally brought for agricultural purposes.'[18] He reported that the price of a male slave averaged $35–$45, that of a female $45–$58. These were considerably lower than the prices Vice Consul Gagliuffi recorded soon after (1852–54) in Murzuk, where the distance to Tripoli and other coastal markets was greater (see Chapter 6). At the same time, Dickson detected in Ghadames what seemed to him to be the stirrings of a moral revulsion against slavery and the slave trade that later in the century was to influence other parts of North Africa, as well as Egypt and Turkey. 'It is a fact worthy of remark in Ghadames', he wrote, 'that some of the respectable traders entirely abstain from trafficking in slaves, out of purely conscientious motives.'[19] But there were still few signs of humanity in the actual conduct of the slave traffic across the desert.

The attitudes of young Vice Consul Dickson at Ghadames seem to have been typical of the well-meaning, self-righteous European abolitionists, and especially their untested ideological conviction that the end of the slave trade in the Sahara, as elsewhere, would bring peace, security and wellbeing through the encouragement of alternative 'legitimate' business. While reporting with understandable satisfaction the crippling of the Ghadames branch of the slave trade, Dickson gave no hint that he had thought about the wider implications of what was happening. Like other of his colleagues in Turkish North Africa and in London, he seems to have been quite unaware that in applauding and encouraging the end of the hated slave traffic, he was coincidentally promoting the eventual ruin of all the increasingly fragile Saharan trading system, and with it the economies and communities that depended on it. Many enterprising merchants, it is true, managed to make 'legitimate' Saharan trade flourish without the main prop of the slave trade for a few decades at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of favourable conditions. And many factors other than slave trade abolition played a part in the final crisis of the general Saharan trade at the century's end, not least the diversion of some of this traditional traffic onto the new colonial railways of West Africa and the Atlantic shipping-lanes. Yet the fact that trans-desert

business had all but collapsed by 1900, leaving oasis-entrepots such as Ghadames with little further purpose, can be traced directly back to the slow death from the 1840s of the local branches of the slave trade, as the only really profitable part of the more widespread and general Saharan traffic. The greatest, most practical and perceptive of explorers of western Africa, Heinrich Barth, had realised by 1855 what slave trade abolition meant for those who lived by it: 'the people,' he had warned, 'are obliged to look most anxiously about for a new channel by which they may supply their wants.'[20]

The movement of slaves through Ghadames in the mid-nineteenth century was not as carefully recorded as the corresponding figures for Murzuk. Dickson did some statistical work on Ghadames slave imports while he was still in Tripoli in 1848 and 1849, and when he took up his post in the oasis he did make regular yearly returns of all local business, including the slave trade. Unfortunately, these seem not to have survived, not even in the complex files of the Board of Trade to which copies of such commercial statistics would have been forwarded as a matter of routine by the Foreign Office.[21] It is nevertheless possible to 'reconstruct' some yearly slave trade figures from Dickson's despatches and reports between 1848 and 1854, but they have to be treated with greater caution than the more detailed and generally more reliable figures compiled by Vice Consul Gagliuffi in Murzuk at about the same time (see Table 7.1).

There was a large import of slaves in 1852 (estimated at 600, since no firm figure is available) because at the end of 1853 (during which 518 slaves were delivered) Dickson reported that there had been 'a striking decrease over the last year in the number of slaves imported hither'.[22] It would seem that just over 3,000 slaves passed through Ghadames in the years 1848–54, or a yearly average of only 445. Over the same seven years, nearly five times as many slaves (almost 15,000, or an average of over 2,100/year) passed through Murzuk. This suggests that Ghadames was by then in some difficulties with new slave trade and slavery prohibitions in Tunis and Algiers, and with the further diversion of traffic to the freebooting operations of Saharan tribesmen whose own travelling and trading patterns had already been upset by

Table 7.1 The slave trade through Ghadames

1848	389
1849	429
1850	400 (E)
1851	226
1852	600 (E)
1853	518
1854	557
Total	3,119
Annual average	445

Source: Vice Consul Dickson's despatches.

Note: E = estimate.

the French advance to the fringes of the Algerian Sahara. For the statistics from the eighteenth century suggest that Ghadames used then on average to handle about half as many slaves as 'Fezzan' (in effect, Murzuk).

Without going into any details, Dickson estimated slave deaths on the road between Sudan (in the widest sense) and Ghadames at 20 per cent.[23] This would seem to be on the high side, although Ralph Austen has accepted it as the norm for the Saharan trade as a whole. But among slaves brought up from Hausaland by the Tuareg, mortality (according to Vice Consul Gagliuffi at Murzuk) was only 5–10 per cent and Ghadames was supplied with most of its slaves by the rather more benign and better-organised Tuareg caravans. However, there is some indication from Dickson's despatches that conditions could be exceptionally harsh for slaves on the short road from Ghat to Ghadames, particularly in winter, and that this may have been the cause of many additional slave deaths. By contrast, the 'parallel' road northwards from Murzuk to Tripolitania was generally considered the easiest stage of the whole Saharan crossing. In 1852 Dickson was quoted as reporting that 80 slaves had died on the road from Hausaland to Ghadames, with nearly one-quarter of those deaths occurring on the final stage from Ghat.

Dickson quite rightly stressed the effects of cold on the gangs of near-naked slaves crossing the desert in winter. 'In January 1821 a fall [of snow] occurred, and proved fatal to a slave-caravan coming to Ghadames from Ghat, the snow having lain a whole night upon the ground, about half a foot deep.'[24] He went on to point out that of the slaves traded across the Sahara and the Mediterranean to the Levant, 'two thirds generally perished from pulmonary affections caused no doubt by the hardship of desert travelling as well as by the change of climate'. For a description of newly arrived trade slaves in Ghadames, there is Richardson's 1845 account of some who had been brought from Bornu:

> They were as much like merchandise as they could be, or human beings could be made to resemble it. They were entirely naked, with the exception of a strip of tanned skin tied round their loins. All were nearly alike, as so many goods packed up of the same quality. They were very thin, and almost skeletons, about the age of from ten to fifteen years, with the round Bornouse features strongly marked upon their countenances.[25]

Though still famous in the context of the Saharo-Sudanese economy, finance and trade, Ghadames by the standards of the burgeoning global business of the mid-nineteenth century was an entrepot of little consequence, and even less so without the slave trade. According to Vice Consul Dickson, the revenue of the oasis around 1850 was a mere £1,700 Sterling/year, while the French traveller Henri Duveyrier in 1864 put it at even less, 30,000 francs (£1,200).[26] The main trade southwards was in British cottons; Venetian glass beads (traditional staples of the Black African trade); dyed raw silk; red cotton cloth; red caps from Tunis; white burnouses and baraccans; short

blades; needles; Misurata carpets; and red sashes. Northwards came ivory; bees'-wax; hides and skins; senna; incense from Timbuctu; *garoo* beans; gold bullion and dust; *zebed* (the secretions of the civet cat prized in perfume-making); and 'showy coloured cottons'; but, Dickson added, 'all in small quantities'.[27] The transit trade in ivory which Vice Consul Gagliuffi had been promoting at Murzuk as an acceptable alternative to the slave trade had reached a rate of over 50 tons/year through Ghadames by the mid-1850s.

Ghadamsi merchants did their best to exploit changing political, economic and trading conditions to their advantage. But they were hampered by the Saharan caravan system: it served them as it had their predecessors for more than a thousand years and it was always an obstruction to greater efficiency and modernisation. 'Following the oldest routes and using the oldest methods known in the Muslim World, the caravan trade could not rejuvenate the entire economy.'[28] According to Jean-Louis Miège, Ghadamsi merchants were 'the real movers' of the general economic recovery that followed the decisive establishment of Turkish rule over the central Sahara in the mid-1840s.[29] They began to cooperate more closely in trade organisation and finance with a network of Jewish entrepreneurs reaching from Europe (especially Malta and Livorno) to the Near East, North Africa and Timbuctu. But all this did not necessarily benefit Ghadames, and in 1864 Henri Duveyrier forecast that the place 'will not long delay in becoming a dead town'. So clearly was the slave trade moving away from Ghadames that when, as already mentioned, James Richardson had been there for a few weeks in 1845, he realised that unless he went deeper into tropical Africa, he could never get the information he needed. That decision took him first to the oasis of Ghat, as an increasingly active slave market well beyond the controls and taxes of Ottoman bureaucracy.

Ghat, actually a series of small oases, is of obscure origin. These oases, although not necessarily the walled town of Ghat itself, are clearly an ancient trading post. Offering good water and dates, this was a natural hub of the caravan trade between the western Sudan and North Africa. For most of the nineteenth century it still had its own special, complex and difficult relationships with the surrounding Tuareg, while guarding its own precarious autonomy.[30] Ghat at that time was called 'a sort of protectorate of the Ajjer Tuareg'. But, despite at least two appeals from the townspeople for Turkish protection, Constantinople judged that a nominal presence at Ghadames and the strong military base in Murzuk were enough to control the central Saharan routes, at least to the extent of ensuring that trade continued to flow across the desert to and from Tripoli. In response to one such appeal from Ghat, the Porte in September 1858 informed the Governor of Tripoli that occupation of the oasis was not advisable as some 'misunderstanding' might ensue. It seems that at that time the Turks had little idea of where Ghat was, how important it was, or what their interests there might have been.[31] They hardly noticed the visit to the oasis by Henri Duveyrier in March 1861. Only attempts by the Ahaggar Tuareg to seize the place in the 1860s and 1870s at

last prompted Turkish occupation in 1875, and then largely because it was feared that the Ahaggar might divert their trade from Ghat to French Algeria.

Different Saharan main roads became difficult and insecure at various times in the nineteenth century. Their fortunes fluctuated with changing political, security, economic, fiscal and other conditions at their termini and/or along their routes, and at the mid-Saharan markets. As some routes withered (Bornu–Murzuk, Timbuctu–Ghadames), others became more active (Hausa–Ghat, Wadai–Benghazi). It is not clear whether the patterns of trans-Saharan trade had always been so volatile, or whether the new and peculiar conditions of the early nineteenth century (such as the Fulani *Jihad* in the Sudan, or the beginnings of European intervention in the Maghreb and the Sahara) caused more instability than before. It is clear, though, that by the mid-nineteenth century Ghat was able to take at least short-lived advantage of the wider changes that were beginning to disrupt the business of other, rival trade centres.

The market was at a main Saharan crossroads, a focus of attraction second only to Murzuk itself at mid-century. Ghat's main north–south communication was straight along the road from Ghadames, which was in turn fed from Tripoli, Tunis and eastern Algeria. From Ghat this road went straight on to Agades in Air, where there were direct links to Bornu, the Hausa States and the Niger Bend. All these roads, although longer and more difficult than the ancient Tripoli–Lake Chad trail, were usable by large slave caravans. Maps suggesting that Ghat had a direct link with the Bornu slave markets overlook the fact that no prudently managed slave caravan would have crossed the fearsome natural barrier of the Tenéré from south to north because there were no wells. But it was an established fact that by the 1840s many caravans northbound from Bornu chose to pass through Air and Ghat, mainly to avoid trouble and Turkish taxes in Fezzan.[32] To the west, Ghat offered an open road to In Salah in Tuat, and so to Morocco and Timbuctu; eastwards there was ready access to Murzuk and the main road to Tripoli, or north-eastward to Augila, the oasis-junction for Benghazi and Egypt.

Through its professional connections with the Ajjer and Kel Owi Tuareg confederations, Ghat in the mid-nineteenth century could offer relatively more security than any other Saharan entrepot, at least for travellers to and from the increasingly active trading milieu of the Hausa States. It also tempted merchants and their business because it was in effect a free-trade zone, well beyond the reach of Turkish interference and taxes levied on slaves and other goods – $3/head on slaves at Murzuk and up to $10/head at Ghadames.[33]

Britain might usefully have established an advanced diplomatic post at Ghat by the end of the 1840s, had Lord Palmerston approved James Richardson's suggestion for a vice consulate there. As Richardson explained, Ghat was the place where merchants of Sudan, Bornu and Timbuctu met those from the coastlands of North Africa for the first time to transact busi-

ness at first hand. There were two trade fairs every year, one in the summer and another in winter, where northbound and southbound Saharan caravans met at this free market. At Ghat, Richardson urged, Great Britain would have the chance to open relations with the Tuareg, 'the most interesting [people] of all this region of Africa'. A consul at Ghat accredited to the Tuareg would be able to appoint agents in Air, Tuat and Timbuctu and 'when the consul had established himself in the good opinion of the Touaricks, the danger in the desert for British subjects would vanish for ever'.[34] But, for all his professional interest in the subject, Richardson barely mentioned the slave trade in his proposals. This was perhaps because he understood that it was far too early to raise the almost impossible subject of abolition with people as deeply involved in, and so economically and socially dependent on the slave trade as the Tuareg confederations then were. Perhaps he had modified his views in the two years since he had assured the Foreign Secretary that the Tuareg of Air would readily put a halt to the slave caravans for a yearly indemnity of $1,000–$1,500: 'It would break the neck of the slave trade via Soudan and the Great Desert,' he had written.[35]

After leaving Ghadames in November 1845, Richardson went straight to Ghat, arriving in mid-December. It was already clear to him that its people were taking full advantage of the disruptions and diversions of the slave trade in the northern Sahara, and the raids of the Chaamba Arabs and other predators on the Timbuctu–Ghadames road. But at Ghat he had to give up plans to go on to Sudan and, after a stay of two months, he returned to Tripoli through Murzuk.

Richardson learned in Ghat that slaves were arriving there at an average rate of around 1,000/year from all the lands of central Africa, and even from as far south as 'Noufee' (Nupe on the lower Niger, well within the orbit of the Atlantic trade).[36] Nearly all the so-called 'Bornu' slaves, he found, were brought from Mandara and Baghirmi 'and other countries at the base of the "Mountains of the Moon"'.[37] All were pagan, and two-thirds were female. The implication here is that some slaves for the Ghat market were being drawn from sources far to the south-east. Their enforced travels would have been far shorter and easier, and their general wellbeing improved, had they been taken straight up to Murzuk, rather than being made to trek for hundreds of extra and unnecessary hours westwards to the Ghat road. Disruptions and diversions on the Saharan roads nearly always resulted in even greater hardships for slaves taken on longer and harder journeys to market.

Of the two yearly fairs at Ghat, the more important was in winter. That was when the main slave caravan came up from the south, usually arriving in small groups over several days. Both fairs went on for many weeks, filling the town and its suburbs with traders from all over northern Africa; at other times of the year, Ghat was almost empty. Richardson was at the great winter fair of 1845–46, and he recorded how the caravans came in (see Table 7.2). He found that the slaves:

> … notwithstanding that they were unusually numerous, were very dear this suq season and afforded the merchants little chance of making money. On average, including children and tender youth, they sold for forty dollars each, but this price being paid in goods, the actual price if paid in money would be thirty [dollars] only. It is not however to be concealed that a Desert Moor, or an Arab, will undertake the most extraordinarily long journeys and undergo the greatest privations to gain a single dollar.[38]

To make his point, Richardson told of an old man he met at Ghat who was going all the way to Tripoli with just *one* slave to sell. He estimated the main sales of the winter fair as 900 slaves at an average of $30 each – $27,000; 160 loads of ivory at $200 each – $32,000; and 130 loads of senna at $15 each – $2,000; total $61,000. He estimated that profits would be one-third more at Tripoli. Ivory, he noted, was of rising importance, and its potential great; indeed, its market at Ghat was already more valuable than the trade in slaves. He judged the European merchandise he saw bartered to be of the lowest quality – 'It is for detestable rubbish of this sort that human beings were purchased in Ghat.'[39]

Slaves and other Sudanese merchandise were also exchanged for the agricultural produce of Tripolitania, including dates, wheat and corn, butter, olive oil, mutton suet and semolina. Richardson noted some trade in gold, leather, skins, sheep and parrots. There was little cash in circulation, and most goods (including slaves) were bartered, causing 'the slowness and dilatoriness with which all commercial transactions are carried out'. Merchants usually spent about two months in Ghat, 'bartering, bargaining and wrangling'.[40]

While closure of the Tunisian and Algerian slave markets undermined the slaving economy of Ghadames, Ghat was an alternative source of untaxed

Table 7.2 The 1845–46 winter fair at Ghat: Caravans

Origin	*Free men*	*Slaves*	*Camels*
Soudan [Hausa]	200	800	600
Ghadames	130	—	280
Tripoli	30	—	80
Tuat	12	—	20
Souf	6	—	12
Tebu of Bornu	20	100	30
Fezzan	15	—	30
Benghazi	2	—	2
Misurata via Tripoli	1	—	—
Totals	416	900	1,054

Source: FO 101/16, J. Richardson, *The Souk at Ghat.*

supply for the many slave outlets that remained open. Merchants were quite willing, for instance, to route slave caravans direct to Tripoli through the Wadi Shatti of Fezzan to avoid delays and taxes at Murzuk and Ghadames.[41] Apart from the other Saharan entrepots, the Mediterranean seaports of the Turkish *Vilayet* of Tripoli and the markets of Egypt and Morocco, outlets for slaves then also included the semi-clandestine traffic into the remoter parts of southern Tunisia and the Algerian Sahara. Reporting from Ghadames in 1845 that Souf Arabs from southern Tunisia were going down to Ghat to buy slaves for re-sale in Algeria, Richardson commented, 'so we find a considerable trade in slavery is going on in the Saharan districts of Algeria under *French* protection' (his emphasis).[42] In March 1848 Consul George Crowe in Tripoli was also reporting to Lord Palmerston on the slaving activities of Souf Arabs in the Algerian Sahara. Crowe later learned from Vice Consul Gagliuffi in Murzuk that these freebooters were paying for slaves mainly in French silver five-franc pieces and had so raised prices that dealers found that buying for the Levant market had become 'a very hazardous speculation'. Slaves taken into Algeria were reportedly bought by Christians, as well as Muslims, leading Crowe to note: 'It is to be hoped that this imputation upon the humanity of Christian settlers in Algeria may prove to be unfounded'.[43] In 1856 Gagliufffi's second successor as Vice Consul at Murzuk, Gaetano de Fremaux, reported that the Ghat market continued to be frequented by Tuati traders, buying newly arrived slaves at greatly inflated prices of up to $80 each, and still paying with the increasingly common five-franc pieces. Consul George Herman added from Tripoli that the trade probably belonged to tribes 'not yet under French subjection' who smuggled slaves into Algeria, 'or more openly into Morocco'.[44] Again, the slaves suffered because they were being forced into longer marches to reach more distant markets where they could still be openly sold.

All this implies that Ghat was becoming an increasingly important centre for the distribution of slaves to Saharan markets as far west as Tuat (and thence to end-consumers in Morocco) and as far north as the fringes of French-occupied Algeria, if not French territory itself. These slave-buying communities had been cut off from their usual supplies by the difficulties and insecurities on the road from Timbuctu to Ghadames, which was largely the result of greater French military pressure on the Chaamba Arabs and other traditionally unruly elements of the Algerian Sahara.

This diverted, roundabout trade through Ghat was first recorded in Richardson's observations of 1845–46 and again in 1850; in some of the statistics of Vice Consul Gagliuffi at Murzuk; and in the more opaque reports of Vice Consul Dickson at Ghadames. What this traffic did show was that Saharan merchants, although in many ways hampered by the archaic constraints of their trade, were quite capable of meeting new conditions and challenges by shifting their business to alternative routes and markets. If they had cared to heed it, there was a clear message here for the European abolitionists, that little was to be gained by closing slave markets and

prohibiting slavery and the slave trade in one or two places so long as traders were still free to find and exploit fresh outlets elsewhere. But even in 1845–46, Richardson learned that slave-traders in both Ghat and Ghadames were already raising their prices because they were worried about trade prospects in the face of slowly mounting European abolitionist pressures. 'Some of the Ghadames merchants even consulted me on the probable duration of the slave traffic,' he wrote.[45]

After completing his nine-month, 1,000-mile round tour of the three great markets of the central Saharan slave trade, Ghadames, Ghat and Murzuk, in 1845–46, James Richardson summarised with new-found authority what he had found out:

1 That the Slave Trade is on the increase in the Great Desert;
2 That slaves were flogged to death *en route* from Ghat to Tripoli and others were over-driven or starved to death;
3 That the youngest female child was violated by her brutal captors or masters *en route* from Bornou to Ghat and Fezzan by the Tibboos;
4 That slave children of five years of age walk more than one hundred and thirty days over the Great Desert, and through other districts of Africa, before they can reach the slave market of Tripoli to be sold;
5 That three-fourths of the slave traffic of central Africa and the Great Desert is supported by the money and goods of European merchants resident in Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers and Egypt;
6 That a considerable traffic in slaves is carried on in the southern provinces of Algeria under French protection by the Shouf and Shanbat [Chaamba] Arabs;
7 That at present there are no wars in central Africa but those undertaken exclusively for the capture of slaves;
8 That slaves are the grand staple commerce of the Soudan and Bornou caravans, and without slaves this commerce would hardly exist, without a great exchange of African commerce;
9 That the trade of Tripoli at the present time entirely depends on slaves, other commerce being neglected or abandoned.

But I observe that there is a vast source of available export commerce without slaves, requiring only that the demand for slaves should be cut off to stimulate the African people to cultivate the appropriate exports, and avail themselves of the natural resources of their countries.[46]

Richardson's account of his travels and his inquiries into the central Saharan slave trade were widely circulated in Britain and elsewhere. In addition to publication in the *Journal of the Anti-Slavery Society* (September and October 1846), they were summarised two years later in his two-volume *Travels in the Great Desert of Sahara, 1845 and 1846*. This was perhaps a more 'personal' account than those of other British Saharan travellers, but

in it Richardson discussed slavery, the slave trade and abolition with the authority of the first-hand witness. Apart from Vice Consul Gagliuffi's early despatches from Murzuk, which of course were not publicly circulated, Richardson brought the first fresh reports of the central Saharan slave trade since the return to Britain of the highly successful Bornu Mission over 20 years earlier. Yet, despite the obvious achievements of his travels, and the light he had shed on an obscure but very old and very active branch of the slave trade, Richardson was unable to go back to Africa for another three years.

8 The Wadai road

> The Wadayan slaves are among the least intelligent negroes in Africa and have the reputation of being thievishly inclined; they are, therefore, the cheapest, but the profit from their sale is very great.
>
> James Hamilton

Trans-Saharan slave-traders had for centuries been using central routes across the desert to supply Ghadames and the Fezzanese entrepots, and various western roads to supply the western Maghreb. But the eastward shift in the Sahara's economic fortunes in response to events over several centuries on both sides of the desert gave the trade a brief and final outlet along the revived, remote and bitterly harsh eastern road between the Sultanate of Wadai and Cyrenaica. Drawing on new sources of slaves from beyond the Islamic–pagan raiding frontier deep in central Africa, the route gave prominence to Wadai itself, to the Saharan entrepots it served – Kufra, and notably Augila – and to the small and undeveloped port of Benghazi.

As already mentioned, slaves in the nineteenth century reached Benghazi from two main sources: from Bornu and Hausaland through Fezzan, and from Wadai through Kufra. These roads met at Augila. This and other small villages making up the oasis-complex of Gialo were surrounded by groves of date-palms[1] producing fruit which, dried and compressed into bricks, was a staple of Saharan communities and travellers. Augila was the hub of the eastern Saharan trade system, offering one road northwards through Agedabia to the sea at Benghazi (220 miles) and another eastwards through the oases of Giarabub and Siwa to Cairo (650 miles). For centuries, this village on the edge of the deep Sahara was a market and a caravan centre for traders and pilgrims bound for Cairo and the Hijaz from western Africa. As far back as the twelfth century, its importance as a trading centre was placed on record by the geographer Al-Idrisi.[2] Although Friedrich Hornemann, travelling for the African Association of London, passed through Augila on his way from Cairo to Murzuk in 1798, finding it mean and dirty, he seems not to have understood its importance.

Slavers had for centuries used the longer road to Augila as an outlet to the

Mediterranean when they wanted to avoid trouble or high taxes in Tripolitania. Francis Gilbert, the British Vice Consul in Benghazi, reported in 1847 that 'small caravans come at irregular intervals two or three times a year from Fezzan, each of which brings Ostrich Feathers, Gold Dust and about 150 Slaves'.[3] It was inevitable that the slave traffic from Fezzan to Augila grew as the Tripolitanian outlets under Turkish supervision became more difficult after the first serious Ottoman attempt at abolition in 1857. Shipments to meet continuing demand from Egypt and the Levant simply quietly increased under the more relaxed Turkish regime at remote Benghazi.

The people of Augila were themselves great slavers, as the *savant* and traveller, Jean-Raymond Pacho, found during his visit of 1825: '… unhappily the slave trade is the only purpose' there. He was quite indignant that people with so many fine qualities spent the best years of their lives and the fruit of their experience 'to go raiding deep into Africa for gangs of young negroes, to carry them off to the slave markets of Cairo and Tripoli'.[4] The British traveller James Hamilton, who was in Augila in 1852, found that the boys there '… commence their apprenticeship in trade by journeys to Benghazi, soon followed to longer courses to Egypt and Fezzan'. Hamilton went on:

> They are the great slave dealers of these countries, purchasing their human merchandise in Fezzan, from wholesale dealers … the latter make every year an excursion into Bornou, and return with troops of five or six hundred slaves, which they afterwards sell in the retail to the men of Jalo … The gains in this trade are very large, and many of these Jalese have amassed in it large sums, which sums, however, they have no means of spending.[5]

But these glimpses of the slave trade by passing European travellers shed little light on its true scale and scope of the great cross-roads at Augila. For the main source of slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century was the increasingly busy road from Wadai, through Kufra. This was the remotest and probably the hardest of all the great Saharan highways. It came back into use, and remained active, later than any other. Its traffic in slaves, at least on the middle sections unsupervised by any outside power, lasted well into the 1920s.[6]

There had been an ancient trade route between the eastern Sudan and Cyrenaica up to the early Islamic centuries, but it had been abandoned. It was only revived in the early nineteenth century when the Sultanate of Wadai needed more direct outlets to Egypt and the Mediterranean than the roundabout route through Fezzan or Darfur. Under Sultan Abd-al-Karim Sabun (1803–13), Wadai quickly expanded to the east and south, using Islamic proselytisation to justify slave-raiding across the Islamic–pagan frontier into the populous animist lands of Dar Sila, Dar Kuti, Dar Runga, Salamat and Baghirmi. Needing to export some of the resultant surplus of

slaves to North Africa in exchange for the manufactured goods of Europe and the Levant, Wadaian traders, after several setbacks, opened the old, difficult, dangerous but direct road northwards through Kufra and Augila.[7]

Owing to internal troubles in Wadai after Sultan Sabun's death, there was no regular traffic on the road until at least the reign of Mohammad al-Sharif (1835–58). His hostility towards neighbouring Darfur had blocked Wadai's traditional trading road eastwards to the Nile Valley, making the alternative outlet to Benghazi even more attractive. The formation and spread of the Sanusi Order, a Sufi brotherhood, at the road's northern end in Cyrenaica from the 1840s had given it another purpose as a politico-religious artery. For the Sanusi first used it as a means of extending their mission deep into the eastern Sahara and Sudan, having largely failed to do so elsewhere. This they did by exploiting the traditional desert knowledge and contacts of such converts and clients as the Zuwaya and Magarba tribes of pre-desert Cyrenaica. In Wadai, the Sanusi had a valuable ally, disciple and agent in Sultan Mohammad al-Sharif, who had met and befriended the founder of the order, Mohammad bin Ali al-Sanusi ('The Grand Sanusi') in Mecca in the 1830s.[8]

The role of the Sanusi Order in trade along the Wadai road in the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially its role in the northbound trade in black slaves and the southbound trade in firearms, has generated warm debate. Trade in general, and the slave trade at its core, were the means by which the Order and its simple message of Islamic revival and submission penetrated the eastern Sahara and Sudan; trade was also the prime purpose of the two-way caravan traffic on the Wadai road. The main agents of this business were the Zuwaya and Magarba tribes, former predators of the eastern desert who had been brought to civil order by Sanusi moral suasion.

Because the Sanusi was the only political–religious entity spanning the full length of the Cyrenaica–Wadai road, it was well placed to use its religious prestige and moral influence to protect caravans, and itself gained from the commercial traffic by levying tolls, leasing storage space, and by receiving gifts and offerings from merchants, as well as those expected from greater and lesser political leaders. Such orderly, peaceful trading and caravan traffic gave a certain unity to the lands under Sanusi influence.[9] Thus the Sanusi Order wove itself into the tribal life of Cyrenaica, the eastern Sahara and Sudan as a political, economic and social organisation, as well as one with a clear religious message. Its lodges (*zawias*) were strategically sited at some of the main markets and religious sites where their spiritual and material influences were likely to have the greatest impact.

There is nothing remarkable in such involvement of the sacred with the material: 'in the geography of sacred affairs, the earthly dimension is never absent . . . politics are never far removed'.[10] Within its own unassailable moral environment, the Sanusi Order had, and encountered, few if any scruples against slavery and the export trade in black African slaves: such practices were sanctioned by time, custom and Islam. They brought considerable

economic benefit to all parties involved. Even the slaves themselves, whatever their material and social disadvantages, were considered to have gained from their necessary submission to Islam. Similarly, the import, stockpiling and trade in firearms could be readily morally justified as essential to the defence of the Saharan–Sudanese *Dar al-Islam* against its encroaching invaders: European arms to counter European imperialism.[11]

The Sanusi themselves needed slaves as domestics, caravan servants and as labour on the extensive lands and oasis-gardens of the Order's lodges. Slaves were either bought from dealers (the Order always had the first choice), or Sudanese leaders sent them as gifts or tribute to the leaders of this highly prestigious order. Unwanted lower-grade slaves were simply channelled back into the northbound trade system.[12] The traveller Weld Blundell, who visited the oasis of Siwa in the Western Desert of Egypt in 1894, wrote that the Sanusiya 'may be described as a very large, well-organised slave driving and slave dealing corporation, managed by the heads of the Brotherhood, with local branches and establishments grouped around the various Zawiyas or convents of the order in all parts of North Africa'.[13]

The road from Wadai was one of the Sahara's most difficult, especially for slave caravans. But by taking control of much of its length, the Sanusi Order greatly improved security and travelling conditions by building its lodges at suitable intervals and keeping the unruly in check. The Order offered merchants and other travellers a common legal, social and commercial system, and even a rudimentary postal service.[14] By about 1860 this was probably the busiest slaving road across the Sahara apart, perhaps, from the roads far to the west meeting Morocco's continuing demands for imported blacks.

For slave caravans coming up from Wadai, the greatest hardships and dangers were the 300 miles from Tekro in northern Borku to Kufra and the long stretches from Kufra across the Sarir Calanscio to Gialo.[15] According to Vice Consul Herman in Benghazi, there were 20 daily forced marches of 14 hours each on the worst stages of the northbound journey from Tekro to Kufra. Caravans halted for about ten days at Kufra and then faced another 12–14 forced marches of 14 hours each between Kufra and Augila – 'a series of route marches of no ordinary severity', he called them.[16] Even the oases of Kufra (which in the 1890s became the headquarters of the Sanusi Order) could supply only fresh food and water but no camels, since there was no pasture for them. Camels, like slaves, thus had to make the full desert crossing with little opportunity for recuperation, and humans and animals both suffered accordingly.[17]

The Sanusi dug deep wells at Bisciara (100 feet deep), 100 miles south of Kufra, and at Maaten es-Sarra (200 feet) a further 100 miles south. But caravans still hurried almost without stopping for days and nights to cover the 150 miles of waterless road between Tekro and Sarra. Such exhausting travel heavily punished the underfed slaves forced to tramp across the high plateau of Borku, often in the depths of the Saharan winter. As early as 1841

Vice Consul Thomas Wood in Benghazi was recording that 'the slaves from Wadai generally speaking arrive in much worse state than those from Fezzan and suffer more owing to want of water and the long tract of Desert they have to cross'.[18]

In 1847 Consul Crowe in Tripoli was once again reporting to London the deaths of many young slave girls due to 'the fatigue and suffering of so long a journey' from Wadai. Because no slave caravan could slow down or halt to allow stragglers to catch up when all lives depended on keeping the pace, many slaves were simply abandoned to die on the road. Vice Consul Gilbert in Benghazi thus wrote in 1847:

> I have been told that the chief reason for so many being abandoned on the journey is not so much the scarcity of food and water, but from the swelling of the feet in traversing the hot sands, they are unable to keep up with the others, and there being no spare camels to carry them, they are left to die in the desert.[19]

In May 1850 Vice Consul Herman rode out from Benghazi to watch the arrival of the great Wadai slave caravan. It was, he wrote, about 2,000 yards long 'and moved at the rate of two miles per hour in perfect silence'. The caravan brought 1,200 slaves (nine-tenths of them women and girls), but 430 slaves and 'upward of 2,000 camels' had died from cold during the 162 days of travel between Wadai and Augila: it must therefore have set out in December. As Herman pointed out, tents were issued on the journey only to 'the principal officers and merchants, their followers and some few of the more valuable slaves'. The rest of the caravan, including all other slaves, were thus left to fend for themselves at night: 'in the absence, therefore, of the more aggravated causes, the action of the dews on the half-naked, youthful and impoverished frames of these unfortunates would alone have been sufficient to produce a great mortality among them'.[20]

This particular caravan had made a long halt at Augila, and its slaves had thus arrived in Benghazi in much better condition than most. As Herman reported in a private note to Consul Crowe in Tripoli:

> Nine-tenths of the slaves are females – among them very fine women, commanding in stature, graceful in carriage, with regular Caucasian features, while their hair parted in the centre and hanging down in long plaits, confined by a *ferronière*[21] of white shells, imparts to them quite an antique character and expression.
>
> I had some conversation with the director of the Caravan, in the course of which he said. 'All we have to give in exchange for European merchandise are slaves and ivory', thus confirming the melancholy fact which the earliest records have taught us, that from time immemorial human flesh has always been the circulating medium of the interior of Africa.[22]

Herman also commented on the fact that the Sultan of Wadai had sent 40 of his own people on pilgrimage to Mecca with the caravan, 'and with them 100 slaves to defray the expense of this pious Mission … thus slavery is made to subserve the very purpose of Religion.' The caravan Herman saw and the merchandise it brought were made up as shown in Table 8.1.

Herman later learned that this caravan had travelled for 109 of its 162 days on the road from Wadai to Benghazi, or 642 hours at an average of two miles per hour.[23] This works out at a fairly reasonable average of six hours/day of walking for slaves on travelling days. But the arithmetic disguises the appalling strain of days and nights of forced marching on the whole caravan, but particularly on the slaves.

A further stimulus to the slave trade out of Wadai was given by the first news of slavery and slave trade abolition in Tunis in 1841, by the closure of the Constantinople slave market in 1847, and by French abolitionist measures in Algiers at about the same time. Such events sent rumours flying through the Sahara that the Sultan himself was about to abolish the trade throughout the Ottoman Empire, thus depriving the Saharan merchants of their main markets, and generally causing 'the greatest alarm among those concerned in this traffic'.[24] The result was an even more active trade as slavers scrambled to make profits while they could. Ever-larger caravans moved northwards, while larger and richer caravans fitted out at Benghazi with trade-goods to exchange mainly for slaves gathered ready for export from Wadai. In 1848 Vice Consul Frederick Henry Crowe in Benghazi reported to his father, Consul George Crowe in Tripoli, the departure of a 600-camel caravan for Wadai with merchandise valued at £20,000 Sterling:

> The goods taken by the Wadiweens (sic) consists principally of Beads, Paper, Corals, Cloth and Cotton fabrics, a small proportion of which, particularly those of cotton manufacture, are British, and lamentable it is to reflect that in exchange for these articles so many of our fellow creatures are sold to Slavery.[25]

The comparison of the £20,000-worth of cheap goods taken southwards by Crowe's 1848 caravan of 600 camels with those brought back by the 450-camel caravan witnessed by Herman in 1850 (total value nearly £65,000)

Table 8.1 The Wadai caravan (May 1850)

People and animals		*Merchandise*	*Values (£Sterling)*
Officers, merchants, followers	70	672 cantars ivory	8,736
Pilgrims	40	6 cantars ebony	80
Slaves	1,200	1,200 slaves	56,000
Camels	450		
Total	64,816		

Source: FO 84/815, Herman to Crowe, 23rd May 1850, enclosed, *State of the Wady Caravan, etc.*

gives some idea of the crude profits of the two-way trade. Slaves clearly made all the difference between a worthwhile and satisfying venture to Wadai and back, and one not really justifying all the toil, risks and dangers involved.[26]

In the late nineteenth century, two of the main slaving systems into and across the Sahara continued to flourish because they were well beyond the reach of European moral outrage and abolitionist ideology. Both were controlled, at least in part, by political entities whose richer classes still needed the slaves the systems delivered, and who were still able to ignore and defy any outside pressures or interference. The first of these was the religious, political and trading system that the Sultanate of Wadai and the Sanusi Order operated to their mutual benefit. The other was the much older system that continued to supply the slave-owners of Morocco with the servile blacks they still needed. At the same time, North African capitals unable to resist increasing European abolitionist pressures – Tunis, French Algiers and, particularly after the Crimean War (1853–56), Turkish Tripoli – had made some effort to curb slavery and slave-trading, at least in and around the cities themselves. But such measures were barely effective in the largely uncontrolled and lawless desert hinterlands. For the geographical obscurity of any Saharan slaving system gave some further protection against European abolitionist enthusiasm. Such pressure was likely to be greater where there was more outside knowledge of a particular slaving road, its markets and outlets, Thanks to the eyewitness reports of British travellers from the 1820s on, and British consular officials' despatches in the 1840s and 1850s, the central Saharan roads serving Tunis and Tripoli were better known than others, and their Mediterranean outlets were the first to come under effective abolitionist attention. By contrast, the Moroccan interior and the trade roughly parallel to the Atlantic coast from the western Sudan to the Maghreb al-Aqsa, were barely known to Europe until the late nineteenth century,[27] the exception being René Caillié's remarkable solo journey from Timbuctu to Fez in 1828.[28] The road from Wadai to Benghazi was, if anything, even more remote and obscure. True, the German traveller Gerhard Rohlfs used it to reach Kufra in 1878 (and barely escaped with his life).[29] But the road and its traffic were not fully revealed to the world at large until the pioneering journeys of Rosita Forbes and Hassanein Bey in the early 1920s.[30] It seemed to make little difference to the survival of the two systems that slaves brought into Morocco were destined to meet a purely local demand, while the Wadai road served both local and more distant markets.

The Wadai road continued quietly to deliver yearly supplies of black slaves to the Mediterranean coast at Benghazi, or across the Western Desert to Egypt, during all the troubles that later in the century created the ideal conditions for large-scale slave-raiding across wide swathes of the inner continent. In effect, one vast slave-hunting domain reached from the Nilotic Sudan (where Egypt started to create its own slaving fiefs in the 1820s) to the Great Lakes and on into the tropical forests of the Congo basin. Order and security were only restored through direct European colonial intervention

that finally, about 1930, put an end to the residual black slave trade along the middle sections of the Wadai road.

The involvement in slave-raiding of organised states such as Wadai, together with the rise of freebooting, wide-ranging slave hunters, and their increasing use of modern firearms and tactics, caused a crisis of disruption, destruction and depopulation in the inner continent at the century's end. 'It is the frightful atrocities committed in the process of capture … the inhuman barbarity with which the slaves are treated on the march … it is the gradual depopulation of large districts of Central Africa … the scenes of desolation which mark this accursed traffic.'[31]

As the economic zones supplying the Saharan slaving system expanded, peoples previously beyond their influence began to be caught up in the new trading, religious and punitive realities of the modern world. Among vulnerable non-Muslims in those parts, 'expanded contact with the north initially translated into the appearance of small numbers of Muslim traders and faqihs in their midst, along with occasional bands of slave-raiders. The Islamic frontier moved progressively southward.'[32]

Ruthless venturer-raiders, their slaving bands armed with breach-loading rifles, built new, multiracial but ephemeral political entities in the troubled south, with slavery, slave-raiding and trading as their main purpose and means of support. The most ambitious and the most destructive of these adventurers was Rabih Fadl Allah, who made and exploited a vast, personal but short-lived Sudanic 'empire'. From the mid-1870s to 1900 he was active first in Darfur, and later in Dar Kuti and other fiefs of Wadai. In 1892 Rabih invaded Baghirmi and then Bornu, where he seized an immense booty in the sack of the capital, Kuka. Slaves bearing 'Rabih's mark', a series of facial scars of varied patterns that he and his lieutenants cut to identify slaves, followers and some subject communities, began to appear in the slave markets of Egypt and the Maghreb. 'To Rabih, all other men, including his sons, were slaves.'[33] He was finally defeated and killed by the advancing French in 1900. Although countries were depopulated and whole peoples were nearly wiped out, Wadai itself escaped the worst of Rabih's horrors. So many people were enslaved, yet very few of them were drawn into the trans-Saharan trading system. The traffic on the central roads serving Fezzan had already been disrupted by insecurity on their middle sections and by abolitionist pressures in the Maghreb. Then Rabih's sack of Kuka in 1893, in which Tripolitanian merchants suffered the greatest losses,[34] dealt almost the final blow to the ancient traffic between Lake Chad and Tripolitania. Yet even a relatively well-ordered slaving entity such as Wadai could send only a few of all the available trade slaves northwards to Kufra and Benghazi, or through the Western Desert to Egypt, because of the many practical constraints on the trade, and the limited resources of the road itself. Once again, the Saharan slaving system, undeveloped and unimproved for over a thousand years, prevented merchants taking full advantage of a sudden glut of cheap trade slaves in the markets of Sudan.

Yet the profits from the trade were still good. In the early twentieth century slaves of both sexes, defined by the trade's standard half-dozen categories of Arabic origin, were sold at the great slaving centre at N'Dele (Dar al-Kuti, now in the Central African Republic) at prices not much different from those James Richardson had noted at Kano 50 years earlier (see Table 6.5). According to the figures of Emile Julien, the first French resident in Dar al-Kuti, some of the widest price differences between the two years and two markets was for young slave boys, and especially for the *sadasi* (grown children) and *subaai* (beardless youths). They were sold at N'Dele in 1901–02 for about double the average price in Kano in 1851. According to Richardson's figures, the highest price for any slave on the open market at Kano was $40 for a prepubescent girl; in N'Dele in 1901–02, a 'pretty and pure young girl' might be had for between $40 and $100, although it is not clear whether this range was quoted on the open market, or in a private transaction.[35] But another source from N'Dele in 1902–03 suggests that prices for female slaves of various ages were still surprisingly close to those asked in Kano 50 years before.[36]

The slight available evidence suggests that slave prices in Sudanic Africa were at least stable, if not actually falling, in the second half of the nineteenth century and that the profits from herding gangs of trade slaves across the eastern desert to Cyrenaica or Egypt were a constant stimulus to the trade. By the century's end the Wadai road was, after all, one of the few surviving and substantial sources of slaves for the clandestine Cyrenaican, Egyptian and Levantine markets. If abolition had disrupted and diverted the trade elsewhere, profits from the sale of the relatively few slaves still being quietly delivered to final buyers no doubt reflected both the scarcity of supply and the risks of continued trafficking.

The Wadai road only became a foremost slaving artery in the second half of the nineteenth century. Only in the late 1840s were caravans reaching Benghazi from Wadai every second year, according to Vice Consul Francis Gilbert, writing in 1847. They each brought from 50 to 120 camel-loads of ivory and between 800 and 1,000 slaves, 'three-fourths being young females and are either slaves born in Waday or kidnapped from Bornou. Those from Bornou are mostly esteemed as being in general the more docile and better tempered than those born in Waday.' In the same report (which is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the slaves' true origins), Gilbert noted that at Benghazi male slaves fetched $50 and females, 'according to their shape and beauty' from $25 (a very low price) up to $100, 'in some instances more'. The slaves from Bornu were brought by the small caravans which, Gilbert recorded, arrived 'at irregular periods two or three times in the year from Fezzan and each of which brings … about 150 slaves'.[37] On average, about 700 slaves were shipped from Benghazi every year, mainly to Turkish Crete and Constantinople. But that export total of course included some of the slaves who had been brought across the desert from Fezzan through Augila. Gilbert's figures for Benghazi's annual average imports (800–1,000

every other year from Wadai and about 500 yearly from Fezzan) imply that there was a local demand for some 200–300 slaves/year in the town, which then had a population of only about 10,000. Even 30 years later the British Vice Consul, J. Hutton Dupuis, reported that 'almost every Arab notable, without exception, residing in the town is a slave owner, and … the sale and purchase of negroes is freely though quietly carried on among the natives'.[38]

By 1850 the arrival of the great Wadai caravan was an annual event at Benghazi. The oasis of Augila, about ten days' caravan travel to the south-east, had become the pre-desert entrepot of the eastern Saharan slaving system. Partial statistics for 1849 imply that it was by then still the junction of trade from Murzuk (336 slaves that year) and now also from Wadai through Kufra (900 estimated). Of the slaves sent on in 1849 from Augila, 814 went to Benghazi, where 160 were sold to local buyers, while 654 were shipped to Turkey and the Levant. The remainder (420 estimated) were herded across the Western Desert to Egypt.[39]

Following abolition of the slave trade in Egypt in 1877 (made more effective by the British occupation in 1882), Cyrenaica and the Western Desert oases remained the only regular slaving outlets in north-east Africa. The slave trade through Libya and Egypt in the last 30 years of the nineteenth century can be estimated by drawing on various conflicting sources. One source suggests that between 1870 and 1890, an average of 2,000 slaves/year may have been imported into Libya from Bornu, Baghirmi and Wadai, with another 2,000/year diverted through the Western Desert and Siwa to Egypt. By the decade 1890–1900, this traffic may have halved in both cases.[40] These figures imply that in the 1870s and 1880s slaves may still have been coming through Fezzan at a rate of 1,000/year, and were being moved up the Wadai road at an average of 4,000/year: Cyrenaica and Egypt 1,600 each and 800/year lost, according to Ralph Austen's standard allowance of 20 per cent deaths and 'desert side retention'. In the 1890s the traffic would, on the basis of these figures, still have been at a yearly overall rate of 2,000 slaves. These figures seem rather high, both in the light of estimates of the Wadai trade earlier in the century, and the known practical restrictions on slave caravans using this difficult road. But there is some evidence that Egypt also acquired slaves from Wadai by more obscure roads running roughly parallel to the Nile Valley through the oases of the Western Desert.[41] It has been suggested that all trade on the Wadai–Benghazi road began to fall off after the British reconquest of the Nilotic Sudan from the late 1890s and the coming of more secure conditions there.[42]

Slaves were not only *traded* along the Wadai road until well into the twentieth century, for the gifts of the Sultans of Wadai to successive heads of the Sanusi Order always included some slaves. According to various sources cited by Jean-Louis Triaud, the Sultans of Wadai offered slaves, ivory and ostrich feathers (the staples of their country's export trade) to the head of the Order, Mohammad al-Mahdi, every year in the late 1890s. Over the four years 1896–99, a total of 335 slaves of both sexes was presented, a yearly

average of 84 slaves.[43] The Sanusi in turn gave some of their slaves to other notables. Enver Pasha, commander of the Turco-Libyan forces confronting the Italian invasion at Derna in 1911–12, was surprised when the then head of the Order sent him 'greetings and gifts … two negresses, ivory, etc.'; and this otherwise resourceful soldier lamented, 'What shall I do with two negro ladies?'[44] The last gift of slaves from the south apparently reached the Sanusi centre at Kufra as late as 1916, seven years after the French had occupied Wadai.

For in practice it took France and Italy many years to police their respective ends of the trade route, while its middle sections were not brought under effective abolitionist authority until even later. The French were not fully in control of Borku and Ennedi until after the First World War, and only established garrisons in Tibesti in 1929. The Italians occupied Fezzan in 1930 and Kufra in 1931.[45] And in the meantime the British conquest of the Nilotic Sudan had made safe and secure Wadai's traditional outlets through Egypt to the Mediterranean. Many travellers, especially pilgrims, preferred to use these old ways rather than the difficult trail through an unruly Cyrenaica where the Italians struggled for some 20 years (1911–32) to impose their authority.

9 The slave trade between Sahara and Mediterranean

> From time immemorial, human flesh has always been the circulating medium of the Interior of Africa.
>
> Vice Consul George Herman

Tripoli was always a main Mediterranean outlet of black slaves traded across the Sahara. For well over a thousand years, it was the terminus of the main caravan trails of the central desert, being supplied with slaves from the south through Fezzan and from the south-west through Ghadames. The abolition of slavery and the slave trade in Tunis and Algiers in the 1840s only confirmed this predominance. But it was short-lived, for by the late 1850s Tripoli, too, was falling victim to European abolitionist fervour, leaving only Benghazi and lesser Turkish North African anchorages as the sole, unmolested Saharan slaving outlets on the Mediterranean. They continued quietly to ship slaves to Levantine markets until the beginning of the twentieth century.

At Tripoli the black slave trade was transformed from an overland caravan traffic out of Africa into a Mediterranean seaborne 'middle passage'. With luck, this was the point at which slaves left their more horrific experiences behind them. For those who reached the sea were the survivors of a pitiless process of mostly chance selection to which they had been subjected ever since their first capture and enslavement far away and many months before. By the Mediterranean they might at last begin to feel something of the vaunted mildness and benevolence of the Islamic system of domestic slavery. By the mid-nineteenth century, moreover, newly arrived trade slaves in such places as Tripoli may have been rather better treated because their arrival, sale and shipment were quite visible to the outside world, with slavery and the slave trade being open, accepted, officially sanctioned and regulated in the main and lesser ports of Ottoman North Africa until at least the late 1850s. The British Consul at Prevesa in Turkish Albania, Sidney Smith Saunders, often saw black slaves from Tripoli landed there for the local market. In 1855 he wrote to the Foreign Secretary ' … the shipment of Africans at Tripoli is still invested with all the character of a regular mercantile transaction, tariff duties being levied thereon, and Customs House

Permits delivered as for all other merchandise'.[1] Anyone in the 1840s and for most of the 1850s with a mind to do so might have counted slaves as they arrived at Tripoli with the incoming Saharan caravans. The observant inquirer might furthermore have witnessed the humiliating open inspection and sale of men, women and children, and learned their prices in the 'big and airy' slave market at Tripoli. Later still, the visitor might have watched and counted the embarkation of perhaps half the newly arrived slaves in small sailing ships and – from the 1840s – also in government steamers bound for other provinces and islands of the empire. He might well have taken a passage on such a slaving vessel himself.

Yet no attentive, visiting Victorian investigator ever observed and reported in detail on the conduct of the slave trade at Tripoli itself, nor at any other ports in the regency. Even James Richardson, as representative of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and despite his professional duty to learn all he could about the traffic, has left no account of its size, its value or its operations at Tripoli. It seems never to have occurred to Consul Hanmer Warrington during all his years at his post, nor to his masters in London, that the emerging cause of Saharan abolition might have been given valuable statistical weight by simple yearly accounts of slave arrivals, sales and embarkations at Tripoli, and perhaps at Benghazi as well.

Only in 1847 did Warrington's successor at Tripoli, Consul General George Crowe, report that during the previous year about 1,200 slaves had been shipped abroad.[2] Thereafter he and then his successor, Consul George Herman, sent London yearly returns of slave shipments, the run continuing without a break until 1856. These show that total slave exports from Tripoli over the 11 years were 12,048 (average 1,095/year). The figures in Table 9.1 are those compiled by *British* consular officials from embarkation statistics apparently passed on by successive European port health officers. They do not necessarily agree with the figures compiled by some consuls of other

Table 9.1 Black slave exports from Tripoli, 1846–56

1846	1,200
1847	1,100
1848	1,510
1849	770
1850	1,259
1851	423
1852	1,007
1853	858
1854	472
1855	2,262
1856	1,187
Total	12,048
Yearly average	1.095

Sources: FO 84 (Slave Trade) and FO 101 (Tripoli, General) files.

nations at that time – in some years there was a very wide spread of statistical opinion.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, the black slave trade through Tripoli was even more vital to the regency's economy than it had been in the eighteenth century, and particularly since the end of Mediterranean corsairing had cut off this second main source of parasitic state revenue. Taking James Richardson's slave sales prices at Tripoli in 1851 (an average of $62.5 for males and $100 for females – see Table 6.5), and allowing the usual approximate ratio of two female slaves traded for every male, the average export between 1846 and 1856 of 1,095 slaves/year would have produced about $96,000. While Consul Crowe's commercial statistics for 1846 suggest that the total value of the 1,200 slaves shipped from Tripoli that year was only around $60,000, or an average of $50 apiece, even this depressed figure was two-and-a-half times the value of all other exports ($25,000). These included trans-Saharan trade-goods – ivory, senna, ostrich feathers, gum arabic and gold dust. Apart from nearly 100,000 gallons of 'fine' olive oil, other exports were mostly the low-grade produce of the local pastoral economy – hides, skins, wool and bees'-wax. Most live animal exports for naval and military victualling in British Malta were through Benghazi at that time, probably because of the continuing effects of drought in Tripolitania. Thus, according to Consul Crowe's figures, the total export trade of Tripoli in 1846 was worth about $85,000, with just over 70 per cent provided by slaves. Crowe, at least, understood the significance of this over-reliance on the slave trade, and he reported with some foresight: 'Hitherto, slaves have formed a large proportion of the Returns sent from the Interior of Africa in exchange for the merchandise. As the hated [slave] traffic declines, other objects of exchange must be sought for, and may not at first be readily available.'[3]

Thanks to slaving, Tripoli's trade imbalance in 1846 (still according to Crowe's figures) was not as great as it would otherwise have been. The main suppliers were Tunis ($30,000–40,000/year), Malta ($60,000) and Livorno ($40,000). Imports included wheat, barley and beans from Egypt and the Levant (again a reflection of the Tripolitanian drought); clothing and blankets from Tunis; textiles from Britain and Malta; and coffee, sugar, spices, earthenware, hardware, Venetian glass beads (still a staple of the trade to Black Africa), iron in bars, and timber, as well as 'small imports of fine stuffs from France and Germany'.

Tripoli's incoming trans-Saharan trade in slaves and other goods was delivered by a succession of large and small caravans that arrived throughout the year, but which were particularly frequent in the best travelling seasons, spring and early summer. In November 1848 Charles Dickson, then engaged in commercial work in the Tripoli consulate, completed a table showing how half a dozen large and about 30 small caravans from Fezzan (Murzuk), Ghat and Ghadames had come in over the first eight months of the year.[4] He listed caravans' dates of arrival, their starting points, the goods carried and the numbers of slaves escorted (see Table 9.2). Although it seems from Dickson's

Table 9.2 Caravans to Tripoli, January–August 1848

Arrival	*Where from*	*Nature of goods*	*No. of slaves*		*Remarks*
			Male	*Female*	
Jan 15	Fezzan	Dates and natron			
Feb 3	Fezzan	Ostrich feathers, natron			
Mar 2	Fezzan	Senna, dates, natron			29 camel loads of goods
Mar 3	Fezzan			5	
Mar 5	Fezzan		5	31	
Mar 9	Ghat	Senna, 5 loads			Via Shatti in Fezzan
Mar 9	Fezzan	Natron, 2 loads			And a few dates
Mar 9	Fezzan		4	30	
Mar 14	Ghat	Senna			Via Shatti
Mar 17	Ghat	Elephants' teeth			A few hides from Soudan
Mar 20	Fezzan	Senna, dates, natron			
Mar 24	Fezzan		15	12	
Mar 31	Ghat		12	18	Via Shatti
Apr 9	Fezzan	Elephants' teeth			
Apr 11	Fezzan	Bees' wax	14	46	
Apr 11	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			21 loads
Apr 12	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth, senna, wax	4	8	Also Soudan hides
Apr 19	Fezzan	Senna	7	18	
Apr 25	Fezzan		11	35	
Apr 28	Fezzan		7	13	
May 3	Fezzan	Senna	19	46	
May 4	Fezzan		9	41	
May 5	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			5 loads
May 7	Fezzan	Natron			110 loads
May 11	Fezzan	Senna	14	39	
May 16	Fezzan	Natron, senna			
May 17	Fezzan	Natron, senna	3	9	
May 21	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			15 loads
May 23	Fezzan	Elephants' teeth, wax, hides, gum arabic			
May 24	Ghadames	Gold, wax, hides, elephants' teeth	78	287	
May 26	Fezzan	Senna			British property.
May 27	Fezzan	Natron, dates			Also 15 parrots and
May 28	Fezzan		10	21	30 sheep from Soudan
May 29	Fezzan	Natron, dates, senna			Elephants' teeth, 172 loads were brought. This is the large annual caravan called Noubeh
May 31	Ghat	Ostrich feathers, senna			

continued overleaf

Table 9.2 Continued

Arrival	*Where from*	*Nature of goods*	*No. of slaves*		*Remarks*
			Male	*Female*	
Jun 4	Fezzan	Senna	93	58	
Jun 7	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth, senna			
Jun 17	Ghadames	Senna			
Jun 18	Fezzan	Senna			
Jun 19	Fezzan	Senna, natron	2	10	
Jun 20	Ghat		11	53	
Jun 25	Fezzan	Senna, natron			
Jun 30	Ghadames	Senna			
Jul 1	Fezzan	Natron	2	9	
Jul 6	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			
Jul 9	Ghat	Senna			
Jul 9	Fezzan	Natron, gum arabic, Ostrich feathers			
Jul 17	Fezzan	Senna			
Jul 21	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth	1	1	
Aug 2	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			Also senna
Aug 8	Fezzan	Natron	6	39	
Aug 15	Fezzan	Natron			
Aug 16	Ghadames	Natron	5	5	
Aug 17	Fezzan		7	8	
Aug 18	Ghadames	Elephants' teeth			
Aug 24	Fezzan	Natron			
Total			339	842	
Grand total			1,181		

Source: FO 101/20 Dickson to Bidwell, 17th November 1848, enclosed *Return of Caravans arrived at the Town of Tripoli from 1st January to 31st August 1848.*

Note
The usual burden of a camel is about 2½ cwt. The average price of a male slave is 1,000 Turkish piastres (£10) and that of the female 1,600 piastres (£16). The males and females are never under 6 or above 35 years of age.

return that several caravans were arriving within a few days of each other from the same Saharan entrepot, these were actually separate sections of the same large caravan, prudently spaced (particularly in the case of slave caravans) to ease pressure on the meagre resources of the road and on the town's limited reception facilities. For instance, the three groups that arrived from Fezzan on 2nd, 3rd and 5th March were very likely sections of the same large caravan; so, certainly, were the four groups arriving from Fezzan on consecutive days in late May.

Dickson's return makes it clear that all the big and important caravans, and especially those with many slaves, arrived in Tripoli early in the year, before the greatest summer heats, fatal to many slaves forced to cross the Sahara on foot. Of the 1,181 slaves (842 female and 339 male) who arrived in

Tripoli over the eight months covered in the return, all but 83 had been delivered by late June, a caravan of only 64 slaves arriving on the 20th direct from Ghat. The largest slaving caravans arrived from Ghadames on 24th May (365 slaves) and from Fezzan on 4th June (151 slaves). Thus, according to Dickson's return, most slaves were delivered in small caravans (such as the two slaves brought in from Ghadames on 21st July) or medium-sized ones. This at least suggests that the roads to Tripoli from the mid-Saharan markets were becoming safer than they had been in the troubled 1830s and early 1840s. According to later figures by Dickson, total slave exports from Tripoli in 1848 were 1,510. This implies that even if the Tripolines themselves bought no slaves at all on their own account that year, or only a few, there must have been a further import of 400–500 in the last four months to make up the difference between Dickson's eight-month import and the full-year export totals.

What also emerges from Dickson's return is the variety and the probably increasing importance of the 'legitimate' trade in raw Saharan and Sudanese produce. Thus the largest annual caravan from Fezzan, which arrived in Tripoli over four days in late May, brought only 31 slaves, but delivered 'British property' of 172 camel-loads of ivory, apparently sent north by Vice Consul Gagliuffi and his Fezzanese partners in Murzuk. His business acumen and his attempts to develop trade in exotic goods is also suggested by the caravan's delivery of 15 parrots, but the arrival of '30 sheep from Soudan' does (unless they were very special) seem to have been a case of taking coals to Newcastle.

The total export of 1,510 black slaves from Tripoli in 1848 was the highest for any year covered by British consular records at the time, apart from 1855, when traders were trying to push through as many slaves as possible in anticipation of Ottoman government restrictions. According to Dickson, males were sold in Tripoli in 1848 at an average of £10 ($50) each and females at £16 ($80), cheap compared with James Richardson's prices for 1851. This suggests that the 1,510 slave exports from Tripoli (at the usual, if not wholly accurate ratio of two females to every male) were worth £21,000. Thus, as in the case of 1846, slaves may have represented by value between two-thirds and three-quarters of the port's total export trade for 1848.

The slave trade through Tripoli then still flourished because the Turks – like the Karamanli Pashas before them – could devise no better economic enterprise. They actually encouraged the trade because it was a main source of revenue, and because so many senior officials in Tripoli and other posts were directly involved in it. Any Turk appointed at that period to an official position in a backwater of empire as remote and unpopular as Tripoli expected to make as much money as he could in the shortest possible time, and slave-dealing was one of the readiest ways of doing so. Thus in November 1847 Consul Crowe reported to London the shipment of 60 slaves from Tripoli to Constantinople, of which half were the property of the Director of Customs, Mehmet Sherif Said:

> The official position occupied by this person afforded him great facilities for carrying on the detestable traffic with peculiar advantage and profit. There can be little hope of the cessation of the trade while those most deeply engaged in it are appointed to important stations.[5]

Again, in June 1848, Crowe reported that two ships owned by the Governor of Tripoli had sailed for Smyrna and Constantinople with a total of 288 slaves on board, of which nearly one-quarter were the governor's property.[6] Moreover, the households of the salaried Turkish officials in Tripoli were in the mid-nineteenth century oases of prosperity in the general economic depression and were probably the largest consumers of slaves, who were usually re-exported to Turkey when their masters' tours of official duty ended.

The Saharan slave trade continued to flourish because it was largely a *replacement* trade. For various reasons discussed in Chapter 3, it delivered fresh supplies of young slaves to replace those who had failed to reproduce themselves and/or to survive the difficulties of an unfamiliar climate, disease environment and urban living, or who had simply been manumitted after some years of service. A former Governor of Tripoli, Haj Ahmed Ezzet Pasha (1848–52), was by 1855 the Governor of Epirus (Albania) and was quoted by the British Consul at Prevesa, Sidney Smith Saunders, as saying that while at Tripoli he had been unable to dispense with female slaves from the service of his harem – 'whom, however, he freed after three or four years' service'. Intriguingly, Consul Saunders also quoted Haj Ahmed as revealing that there were *slave breeding establishments* (Saunders' emphasis) at Tripoli, 'where the children or the parents are sold, as the case may be'.[7]

Contrasting with the general neglect and ghastly appearance of most trade slaves arriving at the mid-Saharan entrepots, some trouble was usually taken to prepare newly arrived slaves for public display and sale in Tripoli. Before entering the town, they were decently clothed, their hair was cleaned and dressed, they were rested, encouraged to put on weight and were taught the few words of Arabic and the basic tenets of Islam that would enhance their value as domestics and labourers.[8] Their skins were oiled to give them a sleek and healthy appearance. According to a report of 1789 by the Neapolitan Consul in Tripoli, Pietro Soler, newly arrived slaves were 'well greased and anointed with oil to make them gleam, while causing them to lose that sort of scabies contracted during the hardships of the march'.[9] The Tripoli slave market was in the main business quarter on the eastern side of the walled city, tucked away in a narrow side street, *Tariq al-Halqa*, Street of the Link (of a chain). It adjoined the Perfume Market and the Jewellery Market.[10]

But for all the claims of the mildness of slavery in Islam, there is evidence that slaves were not always well treated by their final owners, and particularly not in the remoter and wilder provinces of the Ottoman Empire. They certainly did not flourish in a Mediterranean environment. According to

statistics compiled by Charles Dickson (the son of a medical man, but himself unqualified), over half the slave deaths in Tripoli in the late 1840s were due to 'pulmonary affections' in winter, the average age at death being around 25. Also according to Dickson, three-quarters of the black slaves shipped to the Levant died there of consumption.[11] Plague was endemic in the eastern Mediterranean in the first half of the nineteenth century, and there was a further source of contagion at Nofilia in the Libyan Sirtica. Plague was carried across the sterility of the Sahara by caravans, or across the Mediterranean by ships, and there were epidemics in Tripolitania in 1813–19 and 1835–38, and in Benghazi in the late 1850s.[12] Cholera arrived in Tripoli in 1850, 'frightening the people out of their wits', and returned every summer. As for drought and famine, the years 1828–39 seem to have been Tripoli's worst for a long time, much of tropical Africa and the Sahara were affected from the early 1820s to the 1860s, when Tripoli also received below-average rainfall. Slaves, as generally the most menial and deprived members of society, of course suffered most from an unhealthy environment, plague and cholera, and during difficult economic times.

Even in the late 1850s many ships putting into Tripoli were suspected of carrying cholera and the plague. As for the quarantine regulations under the Turkish administration, Consul Warrington had long since judged that it was 'merely nominal to produce revenue. *Pratique* [is] obtained for favour or money'. Given the wretched sanitary state of Tripoli, especially in summer, and the 'extremely filthy state' of houses, the wonder is that the slaves' health resisted as well as it did. But it seems reasonable to suppose that any slave who had survived a forced march across the Sahara on short rations was both mentally and physically tough, a born survivor in fact.

Misurata, some 150 miles east of Tripoli, was better placed to receive trade slaves from Fezzan, and offered shorter voyages to Levantine markets from its open anchorage at Qasr Ahmed (Misurata Marina). From the Middle Ages Misurata had been an important trade counter, shipping local produce to other North African ports and to Venice and Genoa. In the early sixteenth century Leo Africanus found its people were very wealthy. because they paid no taxes at all and concentrated on trade, 'taking the goods shipped there by the Venetian galleys into Numidia [the Sahara], exchanging them for slaves, civet and musk from Ethiopia [Sudan] and carrying them into Turkey, thereby making a profit on both sets of transactions'.[13] In 1788–89 an early would-be explorer of inner Africa, the British Arabist Simon Lucas, was stopped at Misurata by tribal unrest on the road to Fezzan. But he shed much light on its role as a Saharan–Mediterranean entrepot, the only slaving outlet of any importance between Tripoli and Benghazi. He did so by using his Arabic and his time to gain from local merchants a mass of new and valuable geographical and commercial information on inner Africa, and Misurata's trade with Fezzan, Bornu and the Hausa State of Katsina.[14] Then in 1817 Dr Paolo Della Cella, a Genoese surgeon attached to a military expedition sent overland by Yusuf Pasha Karamanli from Tripoli to

rebellious Cyrenaica, learned that caravans from Misurata were trading with Fezzan, Wadai and the Niger Bend countries – a far wider spread of Sudanese contact than Lucas had reported some 30 years earlier. Southbound loads included cottons, baraccans (the woollen, all-enveloping outer garment of Libya) and various coloured glass jewellery 'for the belles of Timbuctu'.[15] Unfortunately, Della Cella gave no account of the northbound slave trade to Misurata.

Apart from the advantages of its geographical position, Misurata seems usually to have been a tax-free port or one, under Ottoman administration at least, where taxes were more easily evaded than at Tripoli.[16] Its greatest weakness as a slaving port was its reliance on the one slaving road from Fezzan: when that failed as a result of mid-Saharan disturbances (such as the series of revolts by the Awlad Slaiman), all its trade suffered. But by the early nineteenth century it was also developing an important export trade in local produce (especially grain) to British Malta, so much so that in 1853 Consul Herman in Tripoli proposed a British vice consulate to serve both Misurata and the nearby oasis of Zliten. However, he made no suggestion that the vice consul should keep a watch on the local branches of the slave trade.[17] Herman later proposed the post for Osman Warrington, fifth son of the late Consul Warrington. He had been born and bred in Tripoli and spoke Arabic. The Foreign Office approved Warrington's appointment in March 1854 and he opened the post in April. He had no salary, but was allowed 'fees of office, etc.' which during his first nine months of duty amounted to a mere nine shillings. Warrington gave up the post through 'ill health' in October 1855 and the office was closed. It is likely that lack of business opportunity had much to do with this outcome.

During his eighteen months in Misurata, Vice Consul Warrington counted the local slave trade, although his round figures suggest these were just approximations (see Table 9.3).[18]

Warrington's figures imply that there was a local demand in Misurata itself for 80–90 slaves/year, such numbers presumably accounting for the differences between yearly arrivals and departures. However, his statistics for the two years vary so widely as to contradict any estimates of Misurata's normal place in the central Saharan–central Mediterranean slave trade. There is no certain way of knowing whether 1854 was an average year for this port, unusually busy, or, less probably, depressed. But it seems odd that in 1855, while Tripoli merchants rushed to export a record of nearly 2,300 slaves in anticipation of Ottoman abolition, the trade through Misurata was only 40 per cent of the previous year's total. The high ratio of male to female slaves in both years (a reversal of the normal pattern throughout the Saharan trade) is also puzzling, although the figures do suggest a brisk local demand for male agricultural slaves.

Misurata, like Benghazi, may have survived as a quiet, unmolested slaving centre until the very end of the nineteenth century. Misurata merchants were to be met at the slave markets and among the slave-drivers along the main

Table 9.3 The Misurata slave trade, 1854–55

Year	*Arrived*			*Departed*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1854	300	200	500	250	160	410
1855	130	70	200	80	40	120

Source: Vice Consul Osman Warrington's despatches.

roads of the central Sahara. On their return northward journey to Fezzan from their wide explorations in the western Sudan in the winter of 1824–25, members of the Bornu Mission travelled with a large slave caravan that included eight merchants from Misurata, out of a total of 35; they were driving a total of 126 male and female slaves out of the caravan's total of 637.[19] Ettore Rossi suggests that both Misurata and Benghazi were still active enough in 1891 to attract the attentions of the local Franciscan representative of the Anti-Slavery Society.[20] Vice Consul Warrington's figures for 1854–55, while confirming Misurata's role in the slave trade at that time, should be treated with more caution than other contemporary British consular statistics because they are unique and because of the questions they raise.

Tripoli by the late 1850s suffered for its own success as the main Mediterranean outlet of the Saharan slave trade by attracting the official disapproval of Constantinople, in turn reacting reluctantly to European (effectively British) abolitionist pressures. But Benghazi quietly avoided the same fate until at least the century's end. Indeed, it can be convincingly argued that Tripoli's loss of its slave trade by Ottoman decree simply transferred corresponding gains to Benghazi, where officials could ignore abolitionist formalities almost with impunity. As the abolitionists hunted and won their objectives along the coast of North Africa – first in Tunis and Algiers, then in Tripoli, and later still in Egypt – so the small, undeveloped port of Benghazi quietly absorbed much of the slave export trade out of Fezzan, diverted away from Tripoli through Augila oasis. As already mentioned (see Chapter 8), Benghazi at the same time became doubly important as the outlet for the new trans-Saharan slaving and trading road through Kufra and Augila oases from the emerging and expansionist Sultanate of Wadai. It was a process further stimulated by the rise of the Sanusi sufi confraternity, first in Cyrenaica and then in the eastern Sahara and Sudan from the 1840s onwards. Thus while Tripoli in the last 40 years of the nineteenth century struggled to live only on the proceeds of local and 'legitimate' Saharan trade, Benghazi grew (despite plague, famine and other disasters) and became relatively prosperous from the slave trade, combined with other Saharan and local exports. The town's increasing importance as regional capital of Turkish Cyrenaica and as a Saharan–Mediterranean trade counter is clear from its growth. The population quadrupled from about

5,000 to 20,000 during the nineteenth century, with a corresponding increase in size; many Tripoline merchants in due course followed the trade there as well.[21]

Great Britain opened a vice consulate in Benghazi in 1827 at Consul Warrington's urging to take advantage of its growing trade in Cyrenaican produce, particularly to Malta. In 1849 the British Vice Consul, George F. Herman (who later became Consul in Tripoli), wrote that 'during eight months of the year the place presents a concentration of horrors'.[22] Three years later the British traveller James Hamilton found that 'the [seaward] approach to the town is not promising … the town itself looks llike a low collection of mud huts unrelieved by a single minaret … ' He estimated the mid-century population at 10,000–12,000 and found 'no absolute poverty among the people', and, apart from some *haj* pilgrims, no beggars.[23] Prepossessing or not, Benghazi by the late 1840s was almost as busy a slaving port as Tripoli, although it did not actually achieve greater importance until after the official Turkish prohibition of 1857 at last began to put Tripoli out of business.

Yearly slave statistics reported by British vice consuls in Benghazi for 1846–56 show that total exports over the 11 years were 9,138, giving an average of just over 830 slaves/year, or around three-quarters of the corresponding trade of Tripoli at that time (see Table 9.4). Only in 1850 did Benghazi export more slaves than Tripoli (1,474 against 1,259 – see Table 9.1).

Although Benghazi was a local administrative centre governed by a Turkish Bey, where by the early 1850s four European vice consuls were resident, it was even quieter and remoter than Tripoli and the authorities there were free to do much as they pleased. They not only ignored abolition orders, but they actively encouraged slavery and the slave trade by dealing in and keeping slaves themselves. Thus as late as 1879, a full 20 years after

Table 9.4 Black slave exports from Benghazi, 1846–56

1846	800
1847	1,000 (E)
1848	1,262
1849	654
1850	1,474
1851	409
1852	1,001
1853	300
1854	526
1855	812
1856	900
Total	9,138
Yearly average	830

Source: British vice consular despatches.

Note: E = estimate.

abolition had begun to take effect in Tripoli itself, the British vice consul in Benghazi reported:

> Almost every Arab notable, without exception, residing in this town is a slave owner and … the sale and purchase of negroes is freely though quietly carried on among the natives … even the local government actually permits all its functionaries, to the utter disregard of all Firmans and vizirial orders, to possess as many slaves as their circumstances will enable them to maintain.[24]

The fourth port of Ottoman North Africa with a resident British vice consul in the mid-nineteenth century was Derna, roughly mid-way between Benghazi and Tobruk. Consul Hanmer Warrington had set up a British vice consulate there in 1840, mainly to promote local trade and the shipment of produce to Malta. Derna, always a small place, is almost due south of Crete, which at least up until the 1870s was a landfall under Ottoman control for most small merchant ships sailing between North Africa, the Aegean and the Levant. But Derna was too far from the main Saharan trade routes ever to have become a large slaving outlet. In 1853, according to a British vice consular report, only ten slaves were shipped from this little place, and in 1854 a mere two.[25] But Derna suddenly became busy in 1855–56 in response to the Ottoman vizirial decree of March 1855 prohibiting the shipment of slaves from the Regency of Tripoli to Crete. Traders very largely ignored the decree, using every available outlet to rush slaves to market in the Levant while they still could. In the 11 weeks between 24th January and 8th April 1856, a total of 254 slaves was shipped from Derna to Crete in three schooners and a brig.[26]

Thanks to abolition at other North African ports, Benghazi by the 1860s was the leading slave outlet on the Mediterranean, probably even busier than Alexandria. Egypt was by then anyway keeping most of its newly imported slaves for itself, partly to meet the labour demands of the cotton boom,[27] and in the 1870s and 1880s came under greater abolitionist and moral pressures against the whole institution of slavery. Benghazi has always been a small, remote place, cut off from Tripolitania by the Sirtica and from Egypt by the Western Desert. Consequently, it was even less well known to outsiders than other ports of North Africa. Despite the presence of several European vice consuls, it escaped the effective attention of the abolitionists and of Turkish officials responding to European moral pressures. The local tax regime and its manipulation or evasion were no doubt easier than in other places. Other nineteenth-century developments ensured Benghazi's unremarked success as a slaving outlet: the opening of the road from Wadai; its use by the expansionist Sanusi Order; and the disruption of the rival Fezzanese and Nile Valley trades by troubles respectively in the central and eastern Sahara and Sudan. If the town and its surroundings themselves had only moderate demand for slaves, the port offered short, relatively easy and

unrestricted voyages (mostly via Ottoman Crete) to places where demand was still brisk: Ottoman Constantinople, Smyrna and Salonika, as well as the lesser markets of the Ottoman Balkans, the Aegean islands and the Levant. Thus overlooked and largely ignored by the outside world, Benghazi seems to have remained an active outlet of the black slave trade until the very end of the nineteenth century, and perhaps almost until the Italian intervention of 1911.[28]

10 The Mediterranean middle passage

> Some days after her arrival [the Ottoman Steam frigate *Saadi Saiki* at Tripoli] it was proclaimed by the Government Crier in the Bazaars and other places of Public Resort that she would convey slaves to Constantinople at the rate of five *Mahboobs* a head.
>
> Consul George Herman, Tripoli, May 1853

After they had crossed the Sahara, nearly all the black slaves exported from North Africa were sent by sea, on a Mediterranean 'middle passage', to their final points of sale. A few might instead be sent overland into Egypt, and from Egypt some slaves could be taken across Sinai to the Levant. But shipping them to markets in the Balkans, the Aegean, Anatolia or the Levant was a much easier and cheaper option.

Unlike the hideous 'middle passage' of the Atlantic crossing, the shipping of slaves across the Mediterranean was usually a relatively benign business. Compared with the Atlantic trade, voyages from North Africa were short (usually no more than three weeks, against the Atlantic average of two months); the sea and weather were generally easier, at least in summer; slaves were allowed more freedom on board; and if Mediterranean slavers were often dangerously overcrowded, the stresses of the voyage were often relieved at one or more intermediate landfalls, where some slaves would be disembarked for local sale and stores replenished.[1]

Yet even in the 'safe' summer sailing season of April–October, the Mediterranean is not always the benign sea of popular imagination. Wind, currents and weather are often unfavourable, particularly for small sailing ships making voyages eastwards or north-eastwards from Tunisia, Tripolitania or Cyrenaica. The prevailing north-westerly winds make for difficult navigation in both directions along the open Libyan coasts. For, unless they stood well out to sea after leaving port, ships sailing eastwards from Tripoli or Misurata risked being swept by prevailing winds and currents into the Gulf of Sirte, with its submerged, uncharted reefs and shoals. Even those who survived shipwreck on that notoriously exposed and desolate coast risked death from thirst and starvation at that juncture of the Mediterranean and the Sahara, or robbery and enslavement by predatory local tribesmen. In the sixteenth

century, Leo Africanus noted the hazards of travel through the Sirtica, and in 1817 Paolo Della Cella, a Genoese surgeon who crossed it as a member of a large military force sent from Tripoli, remarked that safety depended entirely on not meeting anyone.[2]

In the age of sail, according to Fernand Braudel, the main sea-crossing of the central Mediterranean varied with the season, the ship and the intended route – the difference could be very great over long distances. The central Mediterranean islands were essential ports of call for small ships carrying large numbers of slaves but limited stores of food and water. Braudel notes that the significance of the islands lay in providing 'indispensable landfalls on the sea routes and affording stretches of comparatively calm water to which shipping was attracted, either between islands, or between islands and mainland coasts'.[3] Slaving ships from Tunis, Tripoli and Misurata used Malta as a particularly convenient port of call, as was Crete for all merchant sailing ships eastbound from the Barbary coast. Ottoman Crete had the additional advantage of a surprisingly vigourous demand from its Turkish officials for black slaves from North Africa. Thus the British Consul at Canea reported in May 1855 the arrival of a Turkish schooner with 368 slaves on board 'with which she was to proceed to Constantinople after landing here whatever number the slave owner could find purchasers for'.[4]

Up to the early nineteenth century most black slaves were sent out of North Africa in European ships, especially French ones. The Muslim nations simply lacked the necessary merchant fleets. The decline of Muslim sea power, and especially merchant shipping, had started as far back as the Third Crusade, at the end of the twelfth century.[5] Much of the seaborne trade of the Mediterranean then passed to the Italian maritime republics (Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi). Although the Barbary states waged a vigorous naval war against the merchant shipping and coasts and islands of the European Christian powers between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, they still had no effective merchant marine of their own. In the mid-eighteenth century, when Tripoli still had several large and medium-sized warships, her merchants were said to have had 'few coasting and no trading vessels of their own'.[6] The difficulty was not so much that the Christian powers prevented the development of Barbary merchant fleets, but rather that Barbary lacked skilled crews and shipbuilders.

Ships from French Provençal ports were for centuries the great slave-carriers out of North Africa. This seems to have been because French treaty relations with the Barbary states were such that French ships had the best guarantees of immunity from attack by Barbary corsairs.[7] French shippers carried an estimated four-fifths of the trade between Tunis and the Ottoman Empire, and between Tunis and Europe.[8] Other slave-carriers of the central and eastern Mediterranean were from Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik, in Croatia) or from Ottoman Greece; after Russia's expansion to the Black Sea, there were also some Russian slavers in the Mediterranean. As for Tripoli, between August 1721 and September 1726, a total of 44 French ships

left the port with cargoes of black slaves, an average of just over eight ships/year.[9] Such ships, from Marseilles and half a dozen other ports on the French Mediterranean coast, might load up to 250 slaves at a time, which may have been exceptional. French shippers seem to have remained active until the last years of the eighteenth century. In 1767 the former British Consul in Tripoli, The Hon. Archibald Fraser, speculated how British merchant shipping based on Port Mahon in British Minorca might gain a share of this plainly booming and lucrative traffic; he concluded, quite wrongly, that 'Muslim' slaves could not be carried in Christian ships.[10]

After 1793 the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars destroyed this French near-monopoly. The British naval blockade in the Mediterranean, and the general disruption of trade, briefly stimulated Maghrebi merchant shipping, especially between Tunis, Tripoli and the new British naval base at Malta. Although French and other European ships returned to the Mediterranean sea-lanes after 1814, Britain had in 1807 made its own slave trade illegal, and began to put diplomatic pressure on other powers to do the same. France officially abolished the slave trade in 1818, but French slavers (naturally hostile to any *British* initiative) continued to organise Atlantic slaving voyages even after 1830, when slaving became a crime in France. Even in 1832 the French Foreign Minister was writing to the French Consul in Tripoli in terms that suggested that carrying slaves from there to the Levant was no breach of 'our treaties with the Christian powers' and that French merchant captains might accordingly *carry* slaves but not *trade* in them.[11] The British Consul General in Tripoli, Colonel Hanmer Warrington, complained to London throughout the 1820s and 1830s that French ships were still carrying slaves from Tripoli, or that the French Consul was clearing from the port slave ships flying the colours of other nations, notably Austria. Thus as late as July 1833, he reported that a total of 436 black slaves had been exported in European ships over the past 12 months. This was probably about half the total of slaves shipped out during that period, although Warrington himself reported that 'nearly the whole of the [slave] trade is transported from this coast in vessels carrying Christian flags'.[12]

Yet over the next 10–15 years there was a marked change in the pattern of traffic to and from Tripoli, with Muslim ships becoming common. Christian captains, vessels and crews stopped openly shipping black slaves (although some might still be embarked with papers showing them as 'servants'). This change seems to have reflected British abolitionist efforts with the Mediterranean Christian powers: even Greece, independent in 1832, abolished the slave trade in 1841. It also reflected the general economic and social crisis in Tripoli caused by the harsh Turkish war of reconquest (1835–58) and by plague and famine. By 1848–49 Anglo-Maltese ships were reported to have had a near-monopoly of Tripoli's 'legitimate' trade; and few French, Neapolitan or Tuscan ships were still calling there. But about 200 'Turkish' ships (many actually owned by Turkish North African subjects) were putting in every year.[13]

Turkey's merchant shipping had been quietly reviving in the central and eastern Mediterranean for some 20 years, and it carried on the black slave trade out of North Africa for the rest of the century. Since 1826 the Sultan had been encouraging an Ottoman merchant marine that would no longer rely on the revolting and then independent Greeks. In 1828 Turkey acquired its first steamship and by 1840 about 20 steamers, three of them warships, were in Ottoman service.[14] Thus by mid-century most of the black slaves shipped across the Mediterranean from Turkish North Africa to markets in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean were embarked in Ottoman vessels, including some owned by Ottoman subjects of Tripoli, Benghazi, Misurata and Derna. Both private and state-owned sailing ships were engaged in the trade, as also, bizarrely, were steam warships of the imperial navy which could also be used both as troop transports and slavers.[15]

By the 1840s the Mediterranean black slave trade was thus largely confined to the central and eastern basins under continuing Ottoman control. Although Morocco in the nineteenth century was still the largest market in the Maghreb for black slaves brought across the Sahara, all of them were needed to satisfy local demand in the south and in the big cities. Moroccan ports were anyway far from the main centres of demand in the Ottoman Empire, at the other end of the Mediterranean. There were no recorded black slave exports from Morocco after about 1820.[16] But special consignments of valuable eunuchs were occasionally brought by sea from Egypt – 'as the Moors do not possess the art of mutilating for this vile purpose'.[17] Algeria probably never re-exported black slaves by sea, and from the 1830s the French would, in theory at least, have curbed any attempts to do so. Tunisia, which had both imported slaves by sea from Tripoli and had re-exported others to the eastern Mediterranean, also in theory stopped all such traffic after the Bey's abolitionist measures of 1841; but in practice a small, clandestine seaborne slave trade continued for years, if not decades. All these constraints left the Ottoman Regency of Tripoli (modern Libya) and Egypt under Mohammed Ali as the only unrestricted Mediterranean outlets of the black slave trade; there was also a corresponding traffic in white slaves from the Caucasus across the Black Sea to Constantinople and other Ottoman markets.

Most of the ships in the Mediterranean black slave trade were quite small, even by the standards of the nineteenth century – 100 tons or under. Unlike ships in the Atlantic trade, they had not been built, or adapted, to carry slave cargoes. They had none of the distinguishing features of the typical slaver: broad shelving in the hold for the slaves to lie on; many, large gratings for below-decks ventilation; substantial food and water storage; and the means of catering for large numbers.[18] Slaves in the Mediterranean trade were simply loaded (sometimes as last-minute make-weights) into the holds of ordinary merchant ships alongside or on top of their usual cargo of the low-grade pastoral–agricultural produce of northern Africa – hides and skins; in good years grain and olive oil; and perhaps wax and honey. Slavers were

usually listed in British consular reports as 'brigs' or 'brigantines' – workaday, two-masted, square-rigged ships, about 60 feet long, rarely of more than 100 tons, and built to a basic European pattern. Rather more elegant were the little two-masted schooners, most barely 50 feet long, and the handsome. three-masted 'Polaccas' or 'Poleacres', ships up to 90 feet long and showing clear Mediterranean origins. Although usually crewed by no more than a dozen men, it is remarkable that these little ships safely carried cargoes of hundreds of black slaves across the Mediterranean without incident. It is true that most of the slaves were women and girls who generally took a quietly positive view of their situation and prospects. But in any consignment of slaves there were usually some men and boys less resigned to their fate, and who would be confined in the hold if they seemed at all troublesome. On larger ships, at least, women and girls were likely to have been put into separate, enclosed quarters in the hold or in deck cabins, more for the sake of Muslim propriety than practical security.[19]

A much greater danger than troublesome slaves was the improvident habit of loading little food or water for what was expected to be a voyage of around three weeks, with at least one intermediate landfall. The British Consul at Canea in Crete reported how, in April 1856, a small ship with 86 slaves on board put in from Benghazi, where they had been fed only on the blood of cattle. During the voyage, the two Arab slave-owners had fed their charges 'so sparingly that one died on the passage, one a few days after the vessel's arrival, and the remainder were in a most wretched state from want of food'.[20]

All usually went well on these slaving voyages when wind and weather behaved as expected; but small, overloaded ships could soon get into difficulties, particularly in the more uncertain conditions at the beginning and end of the normal Mediterranean sailing season. In May 1847 the acting British Vice Consul at Benghazi, Charles Dickson, reported that some 400 slaves had been shipped for Constantinople in one ship (size not specified), 'but that during the voyage, no less than one third of the number died from the effects of disease caused by the closeness of their confinement on board'. And on 24th October 1856, a brig of 89 tons, and crew of ten, was forced back to the port of Benghazi 'by stress of weather' after trying for 25 days to make her way to Constantinople. At Benghazi, 18 slaves were found in the ship. According to the British Vice Consul, 'These unhappy creatures were placed on board under planks, nailed in such a manner as could not easily be found … The poor souls were got out half alive, presenting a great spectacle.'[21]

Captains and owners were under much pressure to carry more slaves than their ships could reasonably hold, particularly compared with the loading of slave ships on the far longer and rougher trans-Atlantic voyages. The Ottoman brig *Messaoud*, of around 85 tons, perhaps 50 feet long, and with a crew of about a dozen men (hardly more than a large barge) sailed regularly between Tripoli and Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, and then on to Smyrna

(Izmir) and Constantinople, with cargoes of black slaves and general produce (see Table 10.1). She usually loaded about 85 slaves at Tripoli, at the reasonably 'benign' ratio of one slave/ton of ship. But in May 1847 she left Tripoli with 31 black men and boys and 327 women and girls on board, a total of 358 slaves.[22] This gave a ratio of 4.2 slaves/ton of ship, in addition to any cargo of unspecified weight and bulk she may also have been carrying. There is no record of how this pitilessly overcrowded little boat fared on her voyage of some 1,000 miles through the central Mediterranean and the Aegean, with Crete a possible landfall two-thirds of the way across. For comparison, French ships in the Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century loaded slaves at a ratio of two/ton, and on the eve of abolition in the early nineteenth century, larger British ships bound from West Africa for Jamaica carried no more than one slave/ton.[23] The hundreds of slaves crowded into the hold and clinging to the deck of *Messaoud* might have taken little comfort from the knowledge that, if all went well, their ordeal was likely to last only three weeks or so, compared with two months or more to be expected on the Jamaica run. In May 1855 the British Consul at Canea, Crete, reported the

Table 10.1 Black slaves shipped from Tripoli in 1850

Name of ship	*Tonnage*	*Destination*	*Cargo*	*Slaves*		*Remarks*
				M	*F*	
Messaoud	85	Smyrna	Mixed	1	9	
Taif	—	Constantinople	Relieved troops	2	8	War ship 230 crew
Messaoud	120	Mitylene	Mixed	31	230	
Essery Jadid	—	Constantinople	Butter	23	378	Govt steamer 136 crew
—	113	Constantinople	Butter, oil	—	83	
Messaoud	85	Smyrna	Butter, oil	—	177	
Djeilany Bahri	350	Constantinople	Butter, oil	10	92	
Messouda	60	Smyrna	Butter, oil	10	142	
—	50	Scio	Butter, oil, lemons	—	2	
—	75	Constantinople	Lemons and barley	2	18	
—	90	Smyrna	Lemons, barley and butter	2	32	
—	150	Constantinople	Lemons, barley and butter	—	7	
Totals				81	1,178	
Grand total				1,259		

Source: FO 84/857. Crowe to Palmerston, 17th January 1851, enclosed, *Return of Slaves Shipped on Board of Ottoman Vessels in the Port of Tripoli in the Year 1850.*

arrival of an 80-ton schooner from Benghazi with 368 slaves on board, at a ratio of 4.6 slaves/ton; the captain hoped to make the Bosphorus in 23 days. As the Consul reported, the Ottoman Governor of Crete had by then became so concerned with the overloading of slave ships putting in there that he tried to regulate the numbers small and large slave ships could carry; but he failed to distinguish clearly between the two sizes and, illogically, he allowed smaller ships to carry proportionately more slaves than larger ones.[24]

Mediterranean slaving voyages in the age of sail were usually made in the 'safe' season, from April to October. They thus coincided well with the arrival of the great trans-Saharan caravans at North African ports in spring and early summer (see Table 9.2). The Neapolitan Consul in Tripoli reported that in the first three months of 1849 business had been almost at a standstill, and not a single ship had called in March, but that things had then picked up with the arrival of the first spring caravan from Fezzan.[25] The caravans' schedules were partly determined by the availability of trade slaves and other merchandise at the main Sudanese markets in the early weeks of the year. Sensible timing of caravans, like Mediterranean sailing voyages, depended also on the seasons. Prudent caravan-leaders tried to avoid crossing the desert in the high summer when even camels suffered in the great heat, and also in the winter, with its frigid nights that killed off young, ill-fed, half-naked trade slaves raised in the tropics. Thus most caravans arrived at coastal markets between March and July, reaching a yearly peak in the April–June quarter. After being prepared for market and then sold, slaves would be shipped out to further destinations within a few weeks of arrival at the coast. British consular records suggest that there was usually an interval of about a month between the arrival of slaves at Tripoli or Benghazi and embarkation. But a few who were bought very late in the season might have to be held over during the winter, or perhaps sent off in small ships in January and February, well before the start of the 'safe' sailing season.

Some British consular returns of vessels leaving Tripoli with slaves on board in the mid-nineteenth century show that most were shipped out in a few large consignments in April and May, having presumably started their trans-Saharan journey from the Sudan in the early weeks of the year. According to Consul George Herman in Tripoli, 11 ships (both sail and steamers) carrying a total of 770 slaves left the port between April 1856 and February 1857, *after* an imperial decree forbidding all such traffic (see Chapter 12). Of these, well over half (425) were embarked in four sailing vessels over the six weeks between 11th April and 24th May (see Table 10.2). The brig *Messaoud* alone carried 170 slaves (nearly a quarter of the year's total) on one voyage. Other shipments on this scale later in the year were only recorded on 14th November and 23rd December by the relatively large Ottoman war steamer *Sayik Shadi* which was less constrained by the sailing seasons and was able to make the round trip from Tripoli to Constantinople and back to Tripoli within the month. It has been suggested that the dealers of Tripoli and Egypt were able to supply slaves to Constantinople, Smyrna and other large

Table 10.2 Black slaves shipped from Tripoli in 1856

Date ship sailed	*Ship type*	*Ship name*	*Tons*	*Crew*	*Bound for*	*Cargo*	*Slaves*
11 April	Brig	*Messaoud*	89	10	Mitylene	Mixed	170
2 May	Brig	*Nadimi Derdiga*	300	16	Constantinople	Salt	140
8 May	Schooner	*Eftihiga*	75	8	Mitylene	Mixed	100
24 May	War schooner	*Sayah*	—	78	Constantinople	—	15
24 June	Brig	*Mashallah*	89	12	Smyrna	Mixed	15
30 Aug	War brig	*Yevidi Fitooh*	—	89	Canea	—	28
8 Oct	Brig	*Missona*	75	13	Smyrna	Mixed	37
14 Nov	War steamer	*Sayik Shadi*	—	200	Constantinople	—	80
12 Dec	Brig	*Mashallah*	89	13	Smyrna	Mixed	25
23 Dec	War steamer	*Sayik Shadi*	—	200	Constantinople	—	50
						Total	660
1857							
7 Feb	Brig	*Messaoud*	253	19	Benghazi, Smyrna, Constantinople	Ballast	110

Sources: FO 84/1029, Herman to Clarendon, 16th February 1857, enclosed, *Return of Slaves Imported from Tripoli since the Promulgation of the Imperial Prohibitionary Decree*; Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and Papers, 1857, Second Session, Vol. XLIV, p. 474.

Ottoman markets all the year round.[26] But mid-nineteenth century British consular statistics from Tripoli, at least, show that, so long as they had to rely on sailing ships, merchants could do little more than supply slaves on a largely seasonal basis. It was almost inevitable that deliveries of slaves to final buyers in the main cities of the empire should reach their yearly peak around mid-summer, after allowance is made for the trans-Mediterranean voyage from North Africa.

Many of the difficulties and dangers of moving black slaves across the Mediterranean Sea were much simplified and reduced with the arrival of steamships in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the ancient Mediterranean 'middle passage' took on a rather bizarre and novel character when steamers also began ferrying black slaves to market. Larger, sea-going steamers had many obvious advantages over sailing ships. They were faster, less at the mercy of wind, current, tide and weather. Their voyages were thus less hazardous, more predictable, and less stressful for passengers and crew; ships could begin to operate to a time-table with some link with reality. Fewer slaves died or sickened on the relatively larger, smoother and better-appointed steamers, and traders' profits were correspondingly higher. But steamers also had their drawbacks. They were costly to buy and costly and complex to run, demanding the constant attentions of European or American

expatriate engineers and, at least in the early days of steam power, burning large quantities of imported coal. Most were thus owned either by the Ottoman state or by European shipping companies. However, being so visible, and fairly predictable in their movements, they were more open to inspection and supervision by government officials and foreign consuls, and so lost some of their advantage as slavers.[27]

Turkish yards in the nineteenth century built warships and merchantmen of various types, including (with American technical help) steamships; but boilers, engines, pumps and other mechanical parts had to be imported from Europe or America.[28] Until the opening of the Turkish Black Sea mines in the 1850s, all steam-coal was imported from Britain; eventually, about 30 Turkish coaling-stations were set up in the central and eastern Mediterranean.[29]

British engineers were needed to operate the Turkish steamer fleet. In the 1830s a British engineer was in overall charge of Ottoman steam navigation. As a foreign observer then remarked, 'There was not in the whole empire a single Turk who was competent to start or stop a steam engine'.[30] This reliance on foreign expertise went on for many years, for even in the 1850s British engineers were still needed on Turkish steamships. This continuing employment of British expertise had unforeseen legal and diplomatic consequences when it was learned that Ottoman government steamers, including warships, besides being used to transport troops across the Mediterranean, were also carrying black trade slaves from North Africa to markets in Turkey (see Chapter 12).

According to the British Ambassador in Constantinople, the Turkish navy in 1842 had four steamships totalling nearly 500 horsepower in service, with a fifth of 300 horsepower still half-built.[31] Among those in service was the 'steam frigate' *Esseri Jadid (New Creation)*. With a crew of 160, she usually plied between Smyrna and Tripoli as a troopship, but on the return voyage often carried varying numbers of black slaves to market on behalf of dealers or Ottoman government officials in Tripoli. As she could accommodate over 1,000 recruits on the five-day voyage from the Aegean to Tripoli, she usually had plenty of space for trade slaves as well as home-bound troops on the return voyage. It was only in 1849 that Lord Palmerston took issue with the Sublime Porte over the employment of British engineers on board what was in fact a Turkish government slave ship, apparently operating as such for the benefit both of government officials and professional slave-dealers.

The Turks were not the only ones carrying slaves on Mediterranean steamships at that time. Some European shipping lines (notably Italian and Austrian) were in the habit of shipping black passengers under the pretence that they were legitimate 'servants' when it was generally understood that they were trade slaves on their way to be sold. The spread of steam navigation and the operation of regular steam-packet services across the Mediterranean by European companies offered slave-dealers easy means of moving their people to market. Some of the richer returning *Haj* pilgrims brought with

them to Egypt groups of slaves whom they had acquired at the busy market in Mecca;[32] they would ship them across the Mediterranean in European steamers, selling them at a profit at their final destinations in Turkey or elsewhere. The Cadi of Mecca caused a diplomatic stir in Alexandria when in 1838 he took passage for Constantinople on a Tuscan steamer with an entourage of 30 male and female slaves whom he clearly planned to sell on arrival.[33] All such black passengers embarked under the fiction that they were 'servants' had documents or letters of manumission showing them as such; yet they found on disembarkation that they had not, after all, escaped from their slavery. The Tuscan government, which in the 1830s came under intense British pressure to stop shipping slaves on steamers operating out of Livorno, defended their role by claiming that any slave embarked on a Tuscan ship was automatically free – but what the government in Florence ignored was that the slave's newly acquired freedom was unlikely to outlast his landing at a Turkish port. As the British Chargé d'Affaires in Florence protested, 'These slaves have no means of becoming acquainted with the right which the Tuscan government acknowledges that they possess.'[34]

Mediterranean states that had in the 1830s reached anti-slavery agreements with Britain – among them Tuscany, Piedmont, Naples, Austria – could always defend Mediterranean slave-running under their flags by pointing out that the relevant treaties were only directed at the *Atlantic* trade. They could also give the usual assurances that their consuls would never clear from any port vessels known to be carrying slaves. But, as the British Consul in Alexandria reminded Lord Palmerston, 'Austrian consuls in the Mediterranean are satisfied with a declaration that any negroes on board were servants, not slaves'.[35]

Such open abuses continued for many more years. As late as 1852 the Foreign Office was warning the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Stratford Canning, that the Austrian Lloyd Company, operating steamer services out of Trieste, was suspected of shipping slaves from North Africa to Constantinople. Canning replied that a consignment of female slaves (valued white girls from the Caucasus shipped across the Black Sea) had just been sent *from* Constantinople *to* Alexandria on board an Austrian Loyd steam-packet.[36]

But by then Britain was beginning to acquire the evidence and the means to curb Mediterranean slave-trafficking by Turkish ships, and also by the more casual and uncooperative European shipping companies. By his third term as Foreign Secretary (1846–51), Lord Palmerston had a compelling case involving British subjects and British legal principles. He was able to exert pressure on the Turks over the most conspicuous and the most vulnerable aspect of their trade in slaves: the continuing black traffic across the international waters of the central and eastern Mediterranean. Yet, despite these efforts, another half century was to pass before a small, residual and clandestine black slave trade from the ports of Cyrenaica to the Levant was finally ended.

11 Morocco

The last great slave market

> It is astonishing that these badly-fed slaves, completely neglected, and on the road for months, should still be among the living.
>
> Oskar Lenz

In all North Africa, Morocco alone deftly defied most international abolitionist pressures throughout the nineteenth century and for most of it continued to offer trans-Saharan slave-traders a large, lucrative and seemingly almost insatiable domestic slave market. Few, if any, of the slaves brought across the Sahara to the Sharifian Empire were re-exported by sea to more distant markets, although many do seem to have been forwarded overland to final buyers in western Algeria and possibly in Algiers itself. This brisk local demand seemed, moreover, only to have been harmed by economic difficulty and decline towards the century's end, while the slave trade into Morocco itself tended rather to benefit for some decades from the misfortunes of others. For by about 1850 this demand was being met not only by slaves delivered along the ancient northbound routes from the western Sudan but also, following recent trading disruptions in Tunis, Algiers, Tripoli and Fezzan, by consignments diverted from the usual routes of the central Sahara to the Tuat oasis-complex, and so on into Morocco itself from that south-easterly entrepot.

The size, scope and workings of this western Saharan slave trade remain obscure, even in the statistics-obsessed nineteenth century. Indeed, not even the number or the proportion of the black slave population in the empire are known. The problem perhaps starts with the definition of 'Morocco' as a political, economic and social entity. Successive sultans had at best a shadowy authority extending southwards and south-eastwards towards, sometimes into, and occasionally beyond, the Sahara to the desert's southern edge at the River Senegal in one direction; to the Tuat oases in another; and even briefly as far as Timbuctu and the River Niger in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These were all places where the Sultan-Caliph might be recognised and some tribute occasionally sent, but where his practical sovereignty remained disputed even into the twenty-first century, as the

prolonged Western (ex-Spanish) Saharan conflict confirms. In 1789 the British Consul in Tangier reported that the Sultan 'has very little Power to the East of Tetuan and none to the South of Santa Cruz [Agadir] or to the Distance of an inland Journey of Two Days from Morocco [Marrakesh]'.[1]

Yet there were recognised points at which the slaves and other merchandise brought by trade caravans moving from the western Sudan and through the western Sahara could be formally considered to have been 'imported' into the Sharifian Empire. While some of these trade slaves duly crossed the Wadi Draa or the Wad Noun, and then climbed the chilly passes of the Atlas Mountains, eventually to be delivered to final buyers in the teeming markets of Marrakesh, Fez or other 'imperial' cities, many others never reached that far north. Instead, they were absorbed into pre-desert, desert or oasis communities (both settled and nomadic) all the way through, in modern political terms, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and the Western (ex-Spanish) Sahara to the southern pastoral and oasis fringes of Morocco proper. It has been suggested that slaves on the western roads were more likely to be sold off in passing to rural and oasis communities in the interior, where there was a fair but irregular demand, primarily for male agricultural and herding labour, but also for female domestic help. In southern and rural Morocco, there was perhaps less of a clear-cut divide than in the eastern Maghreb between Saharan and North African society, between black slavery and white freedom. More slaves certainly seem to have been sold direct from passing caravans to local buyers on the western roads than on the more sparsely populated stages of the central Saharan slave roads from Lake Chad through Kawar up to Fezzan. Thus the slaves who did eventually reach the heartlands of Morocco and who were very occasionally the subject of not very accurate statistical speculation, perhaps represented only about half those who had originally started the northbound desert trek from the western Sudan. It has been argued that so far as the nineteenth-century western desert trade was concerned, 'At any desert-side market, a North African trader could easily find slaves for sale, but he had to compete with more numerous African users of slave labour. Furthermore, most of the slaves who moved north went not across the Sahara, but into it.'[2]

Black people, either slaves imported from the Sudan, or the racially diverse *harratin*, were particularly common in southern Morocco, as indeed they were in Fezzan and other southerly Saharan centres of amenity. Charles de Foucauld, travelling in the south-western pre-desert in the 1880s, estimated that in some centres nine-tenths of the people were *harratin*.[3] Throughout the western Sahara blacks were at the bottom of a multi-layered social system dominated by 'white' nomadic tribespeople. Lowest on the social scale were the imported black slaves, with the indigenous *harratin* sharecroppers one social grade higher. Between the blacks and the dominant tribes were the tributary herders, the fishermen of the Atlantic coasts, and the artisans.[4]

Demand for slaves in the southern and Saharan markets, and the prices paid for them, seem to have varied greatly from one season to another.

Pastoral nomadic and settled oasis communities found slave labour useful, but not essential. When trade slaves were plentiful and their prices low, many nomads and others could afford to buy. They were also tempted to do so in 'good' years when agriculture, flocks and herds all flourished and investment in extra labour seemed wise. But one good year in the desert, in its oases or on its fringes was rarely followed by another, and as conditions worsened, so slaves had to be sold off or even turned away.[5]

Statistics of the Moroccan slave trade even in the later eighteenth century and for the whole of the nineteenth are few, sporadic and confusing. There is nothing to compare with the yearly statistical trade reports compiled at the main slaving ports and oases of Libya by British consular officials in the 1840s and 1850s. Foreign consuls and travellers, the most reliable of sources, made at best ill-informed guesses about the size of the Moroccan trade at various times and places (see Table 11.1). Even such an expert on all aspects of local life and society as Sir John Drummond Hay, who served as Consul General (later Minister) for 41 years (1844–85), had no real idea of the number of black slaves in the empire, and what proportion of society they represented. His first difficulty was that he could only guess at the size of a host population that had never been counted: he put it at 7 million in 1855, but was probably less than half that.[6]

One reasonable estimate of the slave traffic from Timbuctu to Morocco was made at the end of the eighteenth century. Lord Sydney, the British Secretary of State for the Home Department (also responsible for the Barbary Consuls), had in 1788 asked the British Consuls in Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Tangier to report on the slave trade of North Africa and on the caravan trade into the interior, possibly at the suggestion of one of the members of the newly formed African Association in London.[7] Only two of the four replied: Robert Traill in Tunis (see Chapter 6) and James Matra in Tangier, who some six months later sent a brief but well-informed report.

He started by pointing out that Moroccan trade with western Africa was centred on Timbuctu, then the terminus of North African caravans from as far to the east as Tunis and Tripoli. Each southbound caravan might have between 100 and 300 men: the larger number would make up a big caravan of over 1,000 camels. Travellers from northern Morocco formed up their caravans at Tafilalt (formerly Sijilmasa, later Risani), in the south-eastern desert fringes of the empire, just as the great Moroccan traveller Ibn Battutah had done on his journey to Mali in the fourteenth century. Merchants from the south met up for the desert crossing in the district of Sous. Caravans

Table 11.1 Estimated black slave imports into Morocco: Average yearly numbers

1700–1840	3,000
1840–70	4,000
1870–90	2,500
1890 on	500

were 'conveyed and protected' as far as Timbuctu by successive tribes of Arabs: 'The Arabs are rewarded for the Protection which they give in Proportion to the Number of each Caravan. and the Value of the Merchandize'.[8] This, of course, was the normal system of essential 'protection' provided by Saharan tribes to caravans passing through their territory. The goods carried southwards, Matra reported, included tobacco from Morocco and salt picked up from the mid-desert workings at Taudeni, some 20 days' journey from Timbuctu – 'an Article absolutely necessary for the Inhabitants of Tambuctoo and the neighbouring Countries'. Goods brought from or through Europe and taken southwards included textiles, spices, beads, paper, cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean (the common currency of West Africa), brass wire, needles and 'Dutch or Nuremberg Gilt Paper Looking Glasses'. Northwards across the desert came the long-attested staples of the Sudanese export trade: gold dust, ivory, slaves and gum arabic. As Consul Matra reported, 'The Number of Slaves Annually imported into this Empire from Tambuctoo is estimated at 3 or 4000, the great part of whom are sold at Mascara [north-western Algeria] and in the Neighbourhood of Algiers'. Eunuch slaves were imported from the kingdom of Bambara, on the River Niger, where the king 'I am informed, will give from Twelve to Twenty Eunuchs for One Horse'. Matra also noted that 'the Caravans from the South have decreased very considerably for many years. Their Decay originated from the great Diminution in the Number of Slaves imported …' This, he asserted, was mainly due to Morocco's civil wars of the early eighteenth century and the running down of the large standing army of black troops recruited by the Sultan Mulay Ismael: from a force of 120,000 blacks at his death in 1727, the army had by Matra's time been reduced to 13,000 men, with no more being recruited in the Sudan.[9]

Consul Matra's brief review of the slave trade raises puzzling questions. He was quite right in his assumption that the caravan trade had fallen off as a result of the decline in its mainstay, the slave traffic. His import figure of 3,000–4,000 slaves/year from Timbuctu seems reasonable when compared with the best estimates for the size of the trade in the nineteenth century. But his suggestion that most of these slaves, having finally reached Morocco, were then diverted for hundreds of miles further north-eastwards to distant markets in Algeria upsets certain assumption about the likely respective sizes of the Moroccan and Algerian markets at that time. The implication is that Morocco was then importing fewer slaves than is usually supposed (although Timbuctu was not the only source of supply), while the Algerian market was considerably larger. It also seems odd that trade slaves should have been taken into northern Algeria by a long, roundabout route through Morocco, when there was a much shorter and more direct road from Timbuctu through the Tuat oases and Ouargla. But the logic of geography and the length and convenience of roads were not always prime considerations with Saharan traders. Then Matra's reported exchange-rate of 12–20 *eunuchs* for one horse seems quite excessive. Eunuchs were the most valuable of all

the slaves traded across the Sahara, and the evidence of travellers in the western Sudan, Fezzan and elsewhere from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth is that the common and remarkably stable exchange rate for one imported horse was between 15 and 20 ordinary female slaves.[10] But, as with all travellers' accounts or consuls' one-off reports from such places as Morocco at that time, the facts tend to be spasmodic and impressionistic, usually reflecting only the current year or season and not a long-term trend. Consul Matra's succinct report was no doubt a reasonable reflection of the situation in 1789, insofar as he could assess it, but (as discussed elsewhere – see Chapter 4) one year's findings are not a sound basis for general conclusions on as irregular an economic and social activity as the slave trade across the Sahara.

Nevertheless, there has to be some attempt to quantify that trade, at least for the nineteenth century. Two years after Consul Matra reported, the British army surgeon and traveller, William Lemprière, learned that 4,000 slaves/year were imported from Timbuctu to Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb, a statistic he may well have had from Matra.[11] Further estimates of the size of the traffic in the nineteenth century do little to confirm or refute these early figures. According to Jean-Louis Miège, imports into Morocco could have been as high as 7,000–8,000/year in the early 1800s, while other figures he quotes suggest a yearly import of anything between 1,000 and 6,000.[12] But he is uncertain how many of these were sold to final buyers in Morocco itself, or absorbed by settled and nomadic communities along the slave roads from the south, or forwarded into western Algeria from the Tafilalt oases before they ever reached the Moroccan heartlands.

The prolonged French conquest of Algeria, which after 1830 helped to destroy the economic and social unity of North Africa, diverted much slave traffic from the south into Morocco itself, where imports apparently rose between 1845 and 1866.[13] French efforts in the meantime to divert all the 'legitimate' trade of the central Sahara towards their own new North African possession were partly frustrated by the failure to understand the essential, central role of the slave trade in the Saharan economy at that time.

Estimates of the slave traffic to Morocco by the 1840s vary between as few as 500/year and up to 3,500–4,000/year; Miège eventually settled for the higher figures.[14] The higher figures seem to be more plausible, given the possible size of the domestic slave population (at least 40,000, possibly 120,000) that had to be constantly replenished to maintain its numbers. There were of course variations in such figures from year to year, and from decade to decade. But as late as 1865–70, according to one source cited by Miège, the desert trade was still bringing between 3,000 and 4,000 slaves/year into the Moroccan Empire. With newly arrived slaves fetching anything between 125 and 340 francs/head (about £6–£17), it is convincingly estimated that slaves accounted for half Morocco's nineteenth-century trade with Sudan by value. Such may well have been the case up to the 1870s when, Miège confirms, all Saharan trade, 'legitimate' and otherwise, was badly hit

by increasing competition from Europe and the United States, by disruptions on both sides of the Sahara, and particularly by French advances in Algeria and up the valley of the River Senegal. It is suggested that after 1880 Morocco may have imported no more than 500 slaves/year.[15] In 1886 Consul Hay in Tangier (not necessarily a reliable source) reported to London that 500 black slaves had been brought into the empire in the previous year.[16] These were presumably arrivals from the main road through the south, to Tindouf; other sources suggest that between 500 and 1,000 slaves/year arrived along this road in the 1870s and early 1880s, but that the traffic fell off to only 520 in 1887 and 500 in 1888.[17] Such figures do not take into account traffic by small caravans along the Saharan by-roads, nor through the by then more important market of Tuat. That market was supplied with some of the slaves diverted from the traditional routes of the central Sahara, and particularly from the oasis of Ghat, far to the south-east (see Chapter 6).

For it is likely that by the mid-nineteenth century about half Morocco's total demand for black slaves was being satisfied through the main Tuati entrepot of In Salah. Writing in the early 1860s, the German traveller Gerhard Rohlfs (a more reliable witness than many of his contemporaries) mentioned that between 500 and 1,000 slaves were passing through In Salah every year for transhipment into Morocco itself.[18] Some of these may have been brought up the main road from Timbuctu, the shortest route, but no longer a safe one. For by the 1850s many merchants were setting new patterns of trade to take advantage of changing security and other conditions on both sides of, and within, the desert. The rise of the Moroccan Atlantic port of Mogador (Essaouira) from the 1830s on upset much of the old trade network of the western Sahara, with some centres decaying while other, newer ones prospered. Thus the Tuat oasis-complex (now in southern Algeria, but long considered Moroccan)[19] became an increasingly busy entrepot for traders who by the 1850s were avoiding Timbuctu and other insecure places and roads in the south. Six main Saharan routes converged on In Salah: southwards to Timbuctu and the Niger Bend, and in the opposite direction to the whole vast arc of territories from Morocco (via Tafilalt), to Algeria and Tunisia (via Ouargla) and to Tunisia and Tripolitania (via Ghadames). While it was not as central as Murzuk and did not have as many southward links, In Salah was nevertheless well placed to dominate the trade of the north-western Sahara. The various crises of the mid-nineteenth century brought this entrepot a brief renewal of the commercial importance it had known centuries earlier.

The Tuat oasis-complex owes its existence to the Saura and its tributary wadis, the Sahara's only true river. At least once a year these channels carry great floods of rainwater and melted snow from the Saharan Atlas and the Moroccan High Atlas for some 400 miles into the heart of the northern desert.[20] The three main oases of the Tuat group – Gourara to the north, Tuat itself, and Tidikelt to the south – had immense groves of date-palms, over a million and a half trees, forming part of the so-called 'Palm Road'

from the Atlas to the Hoggar massif in mid-Sahara. Settlements in the Tuat oases were a series of fortified villages: even the main settlement, In Salah in Tidikelt, was such a string of strongpoints. They were all sheltered by the groves of palms whose dates brought traders from other, less favoured, parts of the Sahara.

Long claimed as an outpost of Morocco, Tuat lay at the most south-easterly reach of the Sultan-Caliph's influence, and near the limits of Ahaggar Tuareg commercial penetration; it marked also the outermost range of the 'dreaded robbers' the Awlad Delim, one of the great Moorish tribes of the western desert. Like Murzuk, Tuat was a neutral meeting place and market between mutually hostile desert peoples who there at least could lay aside their differences for the sake of essential trade and business.

The British traveller Major Alexander Gordon Laing, who arrived at In Salah in December 1825 while on his fatal journey from Tripoli to Timbuctu, called it 'a strange isolated place in the very heart of the Great Desert; it abounds in dates of the most delicious flavour which indeed constitute the chief part of the food of the inhabitants …' Laing had also learned that the people 'are I understand commercial, and their appearance bespeaks opulence, every man being well dressed, and the women covered with a profusion of expensive ornaments … '[21] At the time of Laing's visit, local Shorfa Arabs were quickly making In Salah a leading market of the north-west Sahara.[22] This was a role the place had filled in the late Middle Ages when it was marked prominently on the portolan charts of European Mediterranean cartographers. This re-emergence was helped by Tuat's role as an important stage on the main pilgrim route from West Africa, the western Sahara and Morocco to Murzuk and on to Egypt and the Hijaz.[23] The yearly influx of a large pilgrim caravan with slaves and other goods to sell to cover the costs of travel stimulated trade there, as it did later in the pilgrimage season at Murzuk, and indeed at all staging posts where the caravan rested for any length of time. But, coincidentally with Tuat's new-found importance, continual war and raiding between the Tuareg and the Awlad Delim made the main road south-westwards to Timbuctu and the Niger Bend quite unsafe for trading caravans, as Major Laing found to his cost in 1826, when he was nearly killed on the way. And, when in Timbuctu in 1853, the German traveller Heinrich Barth learned that 'toward the north, the communication with Morocco was quite interrupted'.[24]

Tuat's role as an entrepot supplying some of Algeria's demand for black slaves and other Sudanese produce and, more importantly, also a large part of Morocco's, owed much to the emergence of Ghat as an intermediate, mid-Saharan source of supply, an alternative to both Murzuk and Ghadames. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Ghat was in effect a free-trade zone well beyond the reach of Ottoman interference and taxes. By Saharan standards, it had easy access through the Ajjerr and Kel Owi Tuareg to the emerging south-Saharan entity of Damagaram and other forward outlets of the slave and other trades from the Hausa States. (For a fuller discussion, see

Chapter 6.) Thus anything between one-quarter and one-half of the slaves imported into Morocco from the 1840s onwards were likely to have come through the Tuat oases: many of these were slaves diverted at Ghat from the closer, 'natural' outlets of Tunisia, Tripolitania and even Egypt and the Levant through Augila. Such diversions were one outcome of direct European abolitionist measures (as in French Algeria in 1848) and European-inspired abolition (as in Tunisia in 1841 and in Turkish Tripoli in 1857) and they had almost exactly the opposite of the intended effect. For slavers and their charges were forced to make even longer and harder desert marches to reach yet more distant markets, such as Morocco, where slaves could still be legally and openly sold to final buyers. The slave caravan journey from Ghat to In Salah was about the same as that from Ghat to Tripoli. From In Salah to Fez or Marrakesh, on the far side of the Atlas Mountain passes, was about the same again. In other words, slaves were being forced to trudge twice as far across the desert before being sold to final buyers than they would have done before selective abolitionist measures began to take effect.[25]

While it is just about possible to attempt a plausible 'reconstruction' of the layout and size of the central and eastern Saharan black slave trades for one or two years in the mid-nineteenth century, many of the necessary facts, and particularly the figures, are still not available for a similar exercise on the western Sahara. The available material is simply too elusive, and indeed sometimes sheds more confusion than light on the subject. Such are the sales returns for the city of Marrakesh which suggest that in that one market alone in the 1880s and 1890s more black slaves were finding ready buyers there than perhaps ever before. According to these figures, the people of Marrakesh at that time were willing, and had the means, to buy almost as many slaves as had previously been sold through all outlets of the Saharan trade combined.[26] The Marrakesh market returns, averaging sales of nearly 4,800 slaves/year in 1888–94 and over 6,399 slaves/year in the one year 1893–94,[27] are not easily reconciled with the apparent trends of the trade in the last years of the nineteenth century.

Yet it has been suggested that there was actually a remarkable surge in black slave imports into Morocco at the end of the nineteenth century.[28] Such an influx might have been partly caused by contemporary troubles in the western Sudan, including the French conquest, that apparently produced large surpluses of exportable captives. It can be argued that some of these unwanted people (as usual, mostly women and children) were eventually sold off in faraway Morocco. But because of its various constraints and limitations, the Saharan slave trade seems even in the late nineteenth century still to have been regulated more by the 'pull' of market demand than by the 'push' of a sudden glut of exportable slaves at a particular time and place in the main slave-producing and slave-marshalling centres on the far side of the desert.

A late nineteenth century surge in traffic on the western roads as far as the Moroccan heartlands does not fit wholly convincingly into the contemporary

background of general trade decline and economic and financial crisis culminating in the Franco-Spanish protectorate of 1912. Slave market figures provided from nine different towns (but not Fez or Marrakesh) by British consular officials in 1883 and cited by Miege show total yearly sales in all those places were less than 1,400/year.[29] Even doubled to allow also for sales in Fez, Marrakesh and lesser towns and settlements, total sales would be well under 3,000/year, and by no means all these represented new imports, but rather re-sales of slaves already in service.

For the extraordinary Marrakesh figures may partly be explained by the fact that they represented actual sales in the marketplace and not a record of imports. It is not known how many of the figures represent re-sales to new owners of 'second hand' slaves already in the country. If such re-sales represented most of the transactions, the relatively few sales of newly imported trade slaves in such an important market as Marrakesh may indeed suggest a greatly reduced trans-Saharan traffic in the last decades of the nineteenth century, compared with the booming business of earlier times. The economic hardships of the end of the century certainly obliged many slave-owners to sell off the people they could no longer afford to keep or feed. Consul Hay reported in 1883 that after four years of agricultural distress, farmers in the interior districts of the empire had been sending their slaves down to the sea ports,[30] presumably in the hope of getting better prices for them there than they could expect locally.

Foreign visitors in the later nineteenth century remarked on the depression in the slave trade in the larger towns, particularly in the north. The British diplomat, P.D. Trotter, found in the course of two depressing visits to the Fez slave market in 1880 that only one male and two female slaves were for sale – 'Nor was it pleasant to watch intending purchasers eyeing them over like cattle and drawing down the veil from the face of one of the girls to examine her teeth …'[31] But, by contrast, in the far south-east, at the oasis of Tafilalt in 1893, the British traveller W.B. Harris saw that 'quantities of slaves were on sale' and 'it was a pleasure to witness their absolute indifference to what was going on'. Harris found that the slave trade still 'flourished' at Tafilalt and he noted that at the time of his visit slaves brought direct from Sudan:

> were freely hawked about the Sultan's camp. The girls of the Hausa country fetched the best prices, being considered more cheerful and neater than those from further west. The prices average from 30 to 40 dollars for boys and up to 100 and 120 dollars for young girls.[32]

Even later the extraordinary British entrepreneur Donald Mackenzie mentioned that a slave market was held every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in Marrakesh, a frequency that suggests there were indeed still many slaves on offer: 'Girls and boys are generally in great demand,' he wrote. 'The price of girls is about £16 to £20 … Some of the pretty girls are, I found,

brought from Senegal in French vessels as passengers and disposed of privately to wealthy Moors.'[33]

There are few descriptions of slave caravans on the western roads. The young and remarkable French traveller Réné Caillié accompanied one such caravan on his great journey from Timbuctu to Morocco in 1828. His most graphic passages recount the horrors of a large slave caravan running out of water far from wells: 'Nobody suffered more intensely from thirst than the poor little slaves, who were crying for water …'[34]

Over 20 years later another Frenchman, Léopold Panet, travelled from the Senegal to Mogador in southern Morocco through the western Sahara, and at the Wad Noun he witnessed the arrival of a medium-size slave caravan from Timbuctu. There were, he noted, 200 male and female slaves who he judged to have been in 'a frightful state', dressed in rags or wholly naked, (for, according to Caillié, the good shirts they would have been given at Timbuctu would have been been taken off them when they reached the desert). When Panet complained to the local shaikh about the slaves' treatment, the reported reply was that no one was to blame 'since we are only following the traditions of our ancestors'.[35]

Algeria seems never to have been a large slave market: Austen suggests an average import of only 500/year between 1700 and 1900, rising to 700/year between 1840 and 1879.[36] Such may have been the case in the large northern cities, Oran, Algiers itself, Constantine and others. Until its final suppression early in the nineteenth century, the corsair fleet had kept up a rather uncertain supply of European Christian slaves taken from Mediterranean shipping: they were available in numbers large enough to make the keeping and constant import of large numbers of black slaves a less pressing necessity than in other North African centres.[37] The trade across the Algerian Sahara in slaves and other goods was of course seriously disrupted from the 1840s by the long French conquest and abolitionist measures, and despite all well-meant French efforts to protect and promote 'legitimate' Saharan trade. But there were anyway quite large and active markets for black slaves in the populous and extended oases and among the nomadic communities of the vast Saharan hinterland. Such demand continued at least until the imposition of direct French rule under the various phases of the military conquest, with evidence that the French authorities continued in practice to condone and even encourage slavery and the slave trade in many remote desert areas long after they were in a position to suppress them.

According to British consular officials, the tribes of the Algerian Sahara and southern Tunisia were by the late 1840s taking advantage of the Ghadames merchants' loss of their traditional business with Tunis and with north-eastern Algeria up to Constantine to exploit new trading opportunities through Ghat. Thus Vice Consul Gagliuffi in Murzuk reported late in 1847 and early in 1848 that the Souf Arabs of the country west of Ghadames, financed by a leading merchant of Tuat, were taking slaves into parts of the Algerian Sahara still beyond French control.[38] Gagliuffi reported that these

traders, rather than go through the tedious processes of bartering trade-goods for slaves, were mostly buying them up for cash, namely French silver five-franc pieces (each coin worth just under £1 Sterling), newly introduced by the French from Algiers. The resultant surge in slave prices meant that other dealers found difficulty in buying for the distant Levant market through Augila and Egypt. Slaves taken into Algeria were reportedly bought by European immigrants as well as Muslims.[39] In 1856, Vice Consul Gagliuffi's second successor in Murzuk, the Maltese Gaetano de Fremaux, reported that traders from the Tuati oases continued to frequent the Ghat market, buying slaves newly arrived from the south for Algeria and Morocco at an inflated average of $80/head.[40]

Although there was no doubt some francophobia in official British reporting of such slave trade diversions in response to changing Saharan conditions, the French certainly believed in the 1840s that their new possession of Algeria would be best developed with the help of plenty of cheap, imported black labour, free or otherwise. Indeed, it has been argued that the anticipated demand for such labour was one motive behind the French expansion into the Sahara and towards the Sudan.[41] In 1844, plans were published in Paris to buy slaves from the Sudan and put them to work in Algeria.[42] Another contemporary French commentator proposed stimulating the Saharan trade by bringing Sudanese slaves to Algeria, liberating and educating them, and then sending them home as 'missionaries for France, Christianity and liberty'.[43] Then there was the plan of 1852 to buy 100,000 blacks from the Tuareg (as if they had so many to sell) 'to be publicly freed and employed as workers in Algeria'.[44] As late as 1858, Consul Herman in Tripoli was reporting that the French were encouraging new Saharan trading patterns to Algeria's advantage and were importing black slaves there because they made better farm labourers than 'the indolent Arab or the nomadic beduin'.[45]

In theory, slaves were free when they reached any Algerian territory administered under French civil or military law, or even within the jurisdiction of the *Bureaux Arabes.* In a despatch to the Foreign Secretary in 1857, Consul General Bell in Algiers argued that in the southern tribal territories, 'where there are no French stations', it was possible that individual slaves might still be bought or sold, but not up to 500 at a time, as the Vice Consul at Murzuk, De Fremaux, had claimed. Bell suggested that most slaves being brought into the Algerian Sahara were being sent on to Morocco through Tuat, 'the Tuat people having very little or no commerce with the Algerian tribes'.[46] But whether or not French Algeria needed slaves, its desert hinterland certainly acted as a transit route for those bound elsewhere. Vice Consul Gagliuffi in Murzuk had reported in 1847 rumours to the effect that French Algerian traders were importing black slaves for onward shipment 'to Brazil or America', although it was not clear where they were being embarked on their Atlantic voyages.[47] However the suggestion that most slaves in transit were traded through the Tuat oases to meet the greater

demand in the Moroccan Empire than in the Algerian Sahara seems more reasonable.

* * *

Marrakesh is about 1,100 miles from Timbuctu in a straight line; Tripoli–Lake Chad is about 1,250 miles. But these figures disguise the actual distances distances travellers had to cover, and nothing of the difficulties they faced on the western and the central Saharan trails respectively. On balance, and depending on the actual route taken, the western roads seem to have been rather easier, with more water, pasture and other supplies along the way, and western caravans thus tended to be larger. In the later nineteenth century at least, it was common for enormous caravans of up to 10,000 camels to form up at the north Saharan marshalling centre of Tindouf for the journey to Timbuctu. But over three-quarters of them were unladen, since they were to take on loads of salt at the ancient mid-Saharan workings at Taudeni,[48] carrying them to Timbuctu for highly profitable sale and distribution throughout the largely saltless western Sudan.

Travellers crossing the western Sahara from the western Sudan, the Niger Bend countries and from as far east as the Hausa States had a choice of four or five possible routes, served by many different entry and exit points and entrepots serving the Moroccan heartlands and north-western Algeria. The main slaving road from Timbuctu to Morocco passed through Arawan and Taudeni to Taghaza, where there was a choice of routes: northwards through Tindouf and so to the Atlantic port of Mogador, or due north to the Tafilalt and so across the Atlas to Marrakesh or Fez. A second main route took the traveller from Timbuctu to Arawan and thence north-eastwards to Tuat, with its choice of onward roads to the Tafilalt, Ouargla and Ghadames. Then, far to the west, was the road from the upper Niger and Senegal valleys to Waddan and so through the Mauritanian Sahara to Tindouf.[49]

In the nineteenth century, all these roads came under different pressures, some favourable, others not. The fortunes of Saharan roads had of course varied in earlier times, but little is known about this, and the changes do not seem to have been as great or as fast as they were in the century between the disasters of the Fulani *jihad*, starting in the western Sudan about 1804, and the final collapse of the long-distance Saharan trading system around 1900. The rise of the Atlantic port of Mogador as the main entrepot for Moroccan and African exports and European imports gave a new prominence to the western roads through Tindouf, Goulimine and Akka.

Founded by order of the Sultan in 1764, Mogador very soon became the main port of the empire. Its success was largely due to low import taxes and the enterprise of its Jewish and European merchants. By the early nineteenth century it was the entrepot of Morocco (with very close links to Fez), the Sous and the western Sahara, and it handled a large part of the trade to and from Senegambia and the western Sudan. It supplied export markets with gums, ostrich feathers and other 'legitimate' Sudanese produce, and the

interior Moroccan markets with gold dust and slaves.[50] One or two very large Saharan caravans arrived every year, as well as many small ones. There was not a regular slave market: newly imported blacks seem to have been sold off as and when available by auctioneers taking bids for them in the open street.[51]

The main slave market to the south-west of Morocco was at Tindouf. Resettled in 1852, this oasis became the main entrepot of the incoming, north-Saharan trade. Gouliminine, further along the road to Mogador, also prospered as a main departure point for southbound caravans at the expense of two other centres, Akka and Tata, on the road to the Tafilalt. Many of the northbound caravans dispersed at Tindouf, with most of their slaves sold off there, together with other imported Sudanese goods; they were then distributed by smaller caravans throughout the north-west Maghreb.[52]

Slaves and other imported merchandise were also traded at fairs held at the great yearly Muslim and Jewish festivals *(mawasim)* in south-west Morocco. Most took place at variable times between March and October and combined religion with business, pilgrimage with trade. The most important of these fairs was the great gathering of Sidi Hamed Ou Musa in late August–early September, just before the Jewish New Year, and a few weeks before the main Timbuctu caravan set out.[53]

Jews played a larger part in trade between the western Maghreb and the western Sudan than they did between the central and eastern Sahara and their Mediterranean and Sudanese fringes. Jews operated through a series of communities established at the main trading centres of southern Morocco and the south-west, and on a more limited scale in the Sudan itself. At the port of Mogador, Jewish wholesalers dealt in most articles traded with the Sous, the Sahara and the Sudan.[54] Jews rarely travelled with the large Saharan caravans, although they were more likely to be seen on the road to and from Timbuctu.[55] Yet they were the foremost local and regional traders, and their financial interests were pursued on a sub-continental scale. Theirs was in effect a double speculation on the success of both the outward and the return journeys of an individual merchant or a group of traders perhaps making up part of a particular caravan. It has been estimated that a large southbound caravan of 800–1,000 camels on the western roads in the nineteenth century represented an enormous investment of perhaps £50,000 – four-fifths in trade-goods and the rest for upkeep, including presumably the cost of camels.[56] But if the risks of Saharan trade and trade finance were great, and the returns slow to come in, the long-term rewards of such enterprise could be great. The French traveller Réné Caillié remarked on the poverty-stricken appearance of the Jews of the Tafilalt oases in the early nineteenth century, but noted that 'They lend their money upon usury to the merchants trading in the Sudan … Their only visible fortune consists in their houses, but they often take lands as a guarantee for the money which they lend.'[57]

Jews were largely responsible for the trade in ostrich feathers which, more than ivory, skins and hides, and even gold and slaves, was the mainstay of the

short-lived revival of the 'legitimate' Saharan traffic in the 1860s and 1870s. But feathers were a precarious investment, depending on the vagaries of European and American fashion and ruined eventually by the development of alternative, more accessible and more reliable sources of supply in South Africa. The inventory of a large caravan that arrived from the Sudan in 1887 shows that feathers still accounted for just under half the total value of goods and slaves imported (450,000 francs out of 917,000: £90,000/£183,000). By comparison, the 520 slaves imported by this caravan at an average of 200 francs/head (£40) represented just over 11 per cent of its total value, or about the same as the value of the ivory it had brought.[58] The following year, 1888, the caravan was rather smaller (600 laden camels, compared with 650) and the total value of merchandise imported, including slaves, had almost halved (from 917,000 francs in 1887 to 539,000 in 1888) This seems to have been because no feathers were imported, although some other commodities had held up quite well. And while the number of slaves imported had fallen to 500, their total value had risen slightly from 104,000 francs to 120,000.[59]

By the late nineteenth century there had clearly been a marked change in the relative importance of slaves and certain other types of merchandise brought across the Sahara compared with earlier times. The figures for 1887 and 1888 cited above suggest that the large annual caravan on the western roads still brought in a fair number of black slaves. To these have to be added the unknown numbers imported every year by other, smaller caravans, and the several hundred probably still being diverted through In Salah (Tuat) from Ghat and the Hausa States.

Nevertheless, Morocco's trans-Saharan trade in general and its trans-Saharan slave trade in particular were dying in the closing years of the nineteenth century. This is clear from all the available circumstantial evidence, even if the hard statistics are incomplete. It is perhaps surprising that the trade survived in its traditional forms for as long as it did. For throughout most of the nineteenth century, it came under many different and destructive pressures. The gradual running down of the Atlantic slave trade after British abolition in 1807 meant that many more marketable slaves were available in the coastal and inland regions of the west African Sahel and savannah. It is likely that slave prices dropped in response to this glut and that more surplus slaves were pushed northwards towards the western Sahara, but probably not as far as Morocco itself.

The *jihad* of the Tukolor Islamic reformer Umar Tall, which spread warfare and the associated raiding and enslavement of peoples from the upper Senegal valley to the middle reaches of the Niger, caused further slave surpluses and fluctuations in the slave supply.[60] So, too, did the final stages of the French conquest of the Algerian Sahara, completed around 1900, and particularly the conquest of the western Sudan (Timbuctu fell to the French in 1894). Then there was French and Spanish expansion into the western Sahara and towards the undefined southern frontiers of Morocco. For some years France regulated and restricted slavery and the slave trade without

actually ending either, particularly not in regions where slaves might well make up half or more of the population.[61] The opening of new communications and ports in colonial West Africa diverted most of the traditional trade away from the slow, risky and increasingly uncompetitive Saharan trading system. The long rivalry between the Atlantic sea-lanes and the Saharan caravans that had started with the arrival of the Portuguese in the mid-fifteenth century was not finally resolved until the late nineteenth-century predominance of European steam shipping.

In Morocco itself, the insecurity of the unruly south-west and the Saharan roads that passed through them, as well as the inability of the Sultan's government to resist internal and external political, economic and social challenges, all contributed to the crisis of confidence culminating in the Franco-Spanish Protectorate of 1912. A similar crisis had also beset Turkey, Tunis, Egypt and other Islamic states trying to come to terms with the new difficulties, realities and pressures of the late nineteenth century. But Morocco was different from the others in that such pressures were not translated there into an effective abolitionist impulse, into specific and irresistible demands by one or more of the Great Powers for an end to slavery and trading in slaves.

If any one individual protected Morocco from such pressures over many decades, it was the British Consul (later Minister), Sir John Drummond Hay. For so long as successive British governments were persuaded by him to take an indulgent view of the issue, other powers were equally unwilling to face the risks and troubles of doing otherwise. So it was that either through ignorance or design, Sir John was for many years able to disguise in his official correspondence with London the true nature of slavery and slave-trading within the Moroccan Empire. As early as 1842 he had been assuring the Foreign Secretary that there were not many slaves in the country and that, 'according to my own observations and every report', they were kindly treated by their masters who, before they died, often freed their slaves.[62] Years later he was still writing in similar terms: 'Slavery in Morocco exists in the mildest form. Slaves are not used for agricultural purposes – not transported, like pigs, in vessels – and are generally the spoilt children of the house.'[63] Although this was partly true, Sir John had apparently never witnessed, as some contemporary European travellers had, the shocking sight of a trans-Saharan slave caravan arriving at a pre-desert market, nor visited a southern oasis or plantation, where the imported black slave labour was even more debased and exploited than the native *harratin* share-croppers.

In the slave market at Marrakesh, common trade slaves were sold openly and without ceremony to the highest bidder. Only exceptional slaves were offered to selected clients in private houses, and such discreet transactions sometimes involved long negotiations. By the late nineteenth century, at least, there was a distinct shortage of such slaves. Ordinary slaves in Marrakesh were sold off on specific days in the big market square by auctioneers

who at other times sold cattle. The auctioneer would move around the crowded market with two or three slaves, shouting their prices and soliciting buyers. A slave, standing or kneeling, would be examined on the spot by a potential buyer: the feet, head and eyes, inside the mouth and nostrils, and the slave's age, origin and other details would be checked. If no satisfactory bid was forthcoming, the selling process would continue.[64]

Slave-buyers in Moroccan towns were especially fond of little black girls, around seven or eight years old. In the late nineteenth century these children could easily fetch over 1,000 francs (about £100) each, double the amount paid for girls in their late teens. Buyers innocently justified their costly preference by claiming that they needed to train their household slaves from an early age in the unfamiliar routines of Moorish domestic arrangements.[65] As we shall see in the next chapter, slavery and the slave trade were formally prohibited in Morocco in the 1920s. The market for black slaves gradually declined, not so much through prohibitions imposed in response to the moral outrage of foreigners, but because of changing economic, social and family conditions within Moorish society at the turn of the twentieth century. It may be said that in Morocco people stopped buying and keeping slaves because, despite sanction by time, custom and religion, it was no longer socially acceptable to do so, and also because, as economic conditions worsened and money became scarcer, people could no longer afford the luxury of buying and owning slaves.[66]

12 The delusions of abolition

> So powerfully arrayed is the whole body of the ancient prejudice with all the inert resistance of ancient habits against the measure of prohibition that for some time to come I fear it will be impossible to prevent a contraband trade in slaves from this Regency.
>
> Consul George Herman

Abolitionists who hoped and in their various ways worked for the eventual ending of slavery in North Africa, and the trans-Saharan trade that supplied it with newcomers, seemed to do so under the common delusion that their goals would be achieved by single, instantaneous and all-embracing decrees from appropriate potentates. It seems hardly to have occurred to many would-be abolishers that no *firman*, whether from the Pasha of Tripoli, the Bey of Tunis, the Sultan of Morocco, or even from the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph himself, could or would actually halt at a stroke practices sanctioned by time, custom and Islam, and supported by the strongest social and economic arguments.[1] Thus when some cautious Ottoman abolitionist measures were at last decreed in the late 1840s, the results were slight, only partly effective at best, and open to general abuse and evasion, not least by officials of the state. Such measures were often a source of evident disappointment and frustration to British consular officials and others in North Africa who had deluded themselves into believing that the supposedly absolutist Ottoman state could readily command absolute obedience even in places as remote as Tripoli, Benghazi, the Fezzan and the central Sahara. They were not to know that their ultimate abolitionist goals would not be achieved in their own nineteenth century, and even in the twentieth not as thoroughly as they might have hoped. For if the processes of ending slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire took as long as they did, it is not surprising that such practices were hardly eradicated from the remoter parts of the Sahara and its Sahelian and Sudanic fringes even with the completion of their French, Italian or partial Spanish military conquests in the 1930s.[2]

The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, had started to put light abolitionist pressure on the Ottoman government before he lost office in

1841. Stronger pressure came with his return to the Foreign Office five years later. Thus in 1847 the trade in slaves through the Persian Gulf ports was ended and the Constantinople slave market was closed, five years after Cairo's. But markets simply reverted to the back alleys or the closed houses of dealers, well hidden from foreign observers.[3] Such evasions were to become only too common.

In the meantime, the first-hand reports and other writings on the central Saharan slave trade and its workings by the anti-slavery representative James Richardson (1845–48) offered the first fresh evidence in 20 years. The despatches from Benghazi of the British Vice Consul Francis Gilbert on the horrors of the rapidly developing trade through the eastern Sahara from Wadai, and the equally disturbing consular despatches from Murzuk and Tripoli provided the Foreign Secretary with plenty of hard evidence to support firm but friendly representations to the Sublime Porte. These efforts did actually produce some reproving vizirial orders to the Governor of Tripoli. But Palmerston does not seem to have used the yearly slave trade statistics provided by the Murzuk vice consulate, supported by the comparable figures from Tripoli and Benghazi, to reinforce his diplomacy. Rather, he preferred to base his intervention with the Porte on grave and specific instances of abuse. Two particular cases in 1849 gave him the solid facts he needed to make strong representations over the import of slaves across the Sahara into Tripoli on the one side, and on the other the re-export of many of them across the central and eastern Mediterranean to other parts of the Ottoman Empire.

The first such case was the death by thirst of all 1,600 slaves in the Bornu–Tripoli caravan in August (see Chapter 6), while the second concerned the employment of British engineers on board the Ottoman steam frigate *Esseri Jadid*, which was then operating also as a government slaver between Tripoli and the Aegean. Reacting through the formidable Ambassador Sir Stratford Canning (Lord Stratford de Redcliffe) in Constantinople to the Bornu caravan disaster, Palmerston urged the Turkish authorities to consider 'whether it would not be proper and becoming to take effectual steps for preventing such barbarous and inhuman cruelties'.[4] By early November Canning was duly writing to the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Ali Pasha, of 'a catastrophe that seems likely to surpass the long series of horrors brought about by the trade in negroes', and urging the abolition of the trade.[5]

In the summer of 1849 Ambassador Canning had already taken up the case of British engineers' employment on the *Esseri Jadid*, which had arrived at Constantinople on 16th June with 360 soldiers and 16 slaves on board, the property of the Pasha of Tripoli. As Canning observed to Palmerston, 'The circumstance of there being English Engineers on board the *Esseri Jadid*, a government vessel, appeared to offer an opportunity for making some impression against the traffic in slaves on the minds of the Ottoman Ministry.'[6] Yet the Ottoman Foreign Minister, whose reforming convictions did not include the slave trade,[7] waved aside Canning's remonstrances with the usual

remarks about the mildness of slavery in Islam. Although Canning was personally inclined to agree with him, that was not the point. Palmerston was not yet objecting to the *practice* of Ottoman slavery, but rather to the *trading* in slaves and their treatment during their delivery into Ottoman bondage and the involvement of British subjects in that vicious process. It was clearly easier to put pressure on the *Esseri Jadid's* unfortunate British engineers, Andrew Spring and William Davidson. They were summoned to the British Consulate in Constantinople, where they were made aware of British law on British subjects' participation in the slave trade for which, like piracy, the penalty was death.[8] Andrew Spring declared that the *Esseri Jadid* had been carrying troops from Salonika to Tripoli, and from Tripoli to Constantinople:

> … and that he was not all aware that it was the intention of the captain to transport any slaves for sale. That there were certainly Blacks on board at Tripoli, but that from the appearance could not tell who they were, whether they were Slaves or whether they were the Servants of the Officers.[9]

Engineer Davidson made a similar statement. Ambassador Canning wrote the same day to Ali Pasha: 'The undersigned is unwilling to suppose that the Porte would knowingly allow its vessels to be used for a purpose so generally repudiated by civilised states, or its officers to take part in the vilest kind of Trade, under the protection of the Sultan's flag.'[10] This intervention was quite ineffective. In May 1850 the British authorities again had to take up the case of another British chief engineer, Joseph Milward, who was by then serving on the *Esseri Jadid* while she was carrying slaves. Palmerston had already minuted that Ambassador Canning 'should remonstrate with the Turkish Government against the employment of vessels in which British subjects are serving for purposes which render those British subjects liable to penalties under the law of England'.[11] After further representations, Canning reported to Palmerston, 'I have received a distinct assurance from Ali Pasha that orders will be given to prevent any further embarkation of negro slaves on Turkish ships of war.'[12]

At the beginning of September, against a background of continuing British consular reports from Turkish North Africa of fresh slaving disasters, Palmerston instructed Canning:

> You are at liberty to say [to the Turkish government] that Her Majesty's Government would consider the continued employment of Turkish vessels of war in which British Subjects are serving, for purposes which render those British subjects liable to penalties under the law of England, is an *unfriendly act* on the part of the Turkish Government.[13]

In response to this strong diplomatic language, the Grand Vizier in November 1850 issued the promised instructions to the *Kapudan Pasha* (Lord High

Admiral) forbidding the embarkation of slaves on *steam* ships of the Turkish navy. Despite the fact that sailing ships were thus overlooked (and they still carried most of the slaves from Barbary to the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean), Palmerston welcomed it as 'an important step … towards the suppression of the African slave trade of Turkey'.[14] So it might have seemed at the time, but the British campaign against the Mediterranean slave trade out of North Africa was by no means over.

To the evident frustration of British consular officials in Tripoli, the 1850 decree was openly ignored. Thus in May 1853 the Ottoman steam frigate *Saadi Shaki* brought a contingent of troops to Tripoli. As Consul Herman reported to both London and Constantinople, 'Some days after her arrival, it was proclaimed by the Government Crier in the Bazaars and other places of Public Resort that she would carry slaves to Constantinople at the rate of five *Mahboobs* [just under £1 Sterling] a head.'[15]

The Anglo-French intervention in the Crimean War in defence of Turkey (1853–56) gave Britain greater abolitionist leverage. In 1855 and 1856 various abolitionist orders banned the trade in slaves between Tripoli and other Ottoman provinces, although in practice these were largely ineffective. Under new regulations introduced by the Governor of Tripoli in 1856, slaves could be embarked for export only after their manumission witnessed by a Qadi (civil judge). The certificate of manumission held by each slave (and a copy by the ship's captain) was surrendered to the authorities at the port of disembarkation. Such arrangements were easily abused and evaded. But Britain's case seemed at last to have been won with the Sultan's *firman* of January 1857 forbidding the trade in black slaves. Dealers in Tripoli had eight weeks to bring in and sell their slaves. After that, any slaves arriving in Tripoli were to be freed, and the trader imprisoned. Also within six weeks of the order taking effect, any Turkish ship putting in at any Turkish Mediterranean port with slaves on board was to be confiscated, its captain imprisoned, and the slaves freed.[16] The *firman* may indeed have been a major landmark in the history of the suppression of the slave trade in the Ottoman Empire[17] with the open trade through Tripoli gradually curbed over several years, but many decades were to pass before the *firman* was wholly effective.

Slaves were shipped out of North Africa and across the Mediterranean long after the trade had been officially banned. There was little difficulty in doing so. When dealers embarked slaves on any ship, including European-owned steamers, it was usually enough to declare that they were servants, not slaves. Alternatively, dealers would ask European Consuls to manumit slaves and provide the necessary certificates before embarkation – but 'on landing they are as much in slavery as if no such act had been done'.[18] For as the tireless British Consul on Crete, H.S. Ongley, expressed it, 'Nothing can be easier for a Captain sailing with Slaves from one Turkish port to another to have his Papers arranged, as that the Slaves may appear to be Passengers.'[19] We have already seen how the British engineers on the steam frigate *Esseri*

Jadid had reasonably based their defence on their inability to tell apart slaves from servants.

At Tripoli Consul Herman became a constant and cynical witness of the abuse and cheating that surrounded the illegal slave trade out of Tripoli until well into the 1860s. As he wrote in 1857, some nine months after the *firman* had been issued, 'so long as a vent can be found for it, the slave trade will continue to flourish'. By the 'culpable connivance' of the local authorities, small parties of slaves were still being embarked for Constantinople and the Levant 'by every vessel leaving Tripoli'.[20] Herman called the system of giving slaves certificates of their own manumission before embarkation 'an outrageous fiction' and he wrote wearily of 'the utter futility of ever dreaming of crushing the evil with the means of repression that exists here'.[21] Even the working of the quarantine regulations at Tripoli port was a farce, with the clerks free to send off ships with any number of supposedly 'healthy' slaves. Other slaves were smuggled out of Tripoli by sea at night, or were picked up at isolated spots along the coast by Levant-bound ships.[22] In 1863 Consul Herman was reporting the embarkation of 15 slaves one night 'within a mile of the town gates' of Tripoli,[23] and as late as 1879 the Vice Consul in Benghazi reported that slaves were being shipped from there to Tripoli.[24]

The Ottoman slave trade might have been more speedily ended if slavery as an institution had been abolished at the same time. But successive British governments from the 1840s onwards upheld the policy that the Ottoman Empire was not ready for such a social and economic upheaval. No government was willing to force a direct religious, ideological and cultural clash between contemporary Islamic and western (basically American) practices of slavery, and differing perceptions of slavery as an institution.[25] The end of Ottoman slavery was decreed in 1889, only after further westernising influences had undermined the confidence of another generation or two of Turks in their traditional values.[26] Moreover, a trend in Turkish society in the later nineteenth century to reject the 'slave girl' in favour of more romantic and stable long-term relationships has also been noted.[27]

It was one thing to decree the end of the slave trade along 'those channels which Herodotus first revealed to us through which it has continued to flow for upwards of two thousand years'[28] and quite another thing actually to do so. Consul Herman and his staff in Tripoli, who were very closely involved in the daily realities of British efforts to abolish the trade, had very few illusions about the practical difficulties. He realised, for instance, that the Governor of Tripoli, Othman Pasha, had an almost impossible task. Assessing the effects of the Sultan's *firman* of 1857, Herman wrote, 'He stands alone, and the whole body of ancient and inveterate prejudice is arrayed against him on this question.' As Herman rightly pointed out, the Regency of Tripoli was surrounded on three sides by boundless desert, and on the fourth by an almost uninhabited seaboard of nearly 1,600 miles. 'To prevent smuggling, with the slender means at the disposition of the Pasha, along so extended a line of frontier, is utterly impossible.'[29]

Assessing the effects of the Sultan's *firman* of 1857 after some six years, Consul Herman judged that most of the trade had been diverted from Tripoli to Algeria (presumably through Ghat) or to Egypt. As he reported to London, '… such slaves as are not absorbed by the demand of the Egyptian Market are despatched in small parties across the Red Sea into Arabia from where they are distributed throughout the Levant.'[30] What a vision of weary, seemingly endless trudging across the deserts of Africa and Asia these few words summon up! Siwa Oasis in the Western Desert was the centre of this Egyptian trade, served by Ghat, far to the south-west.[31]

Consul Herman in 1863 summed up the difficulties of curbing the overland trade thus:

> So essential and time honoured an element is Negro Slavery in the domestic organisation of the Turks and such the extent and unguarded condition of the Egyptian Frontier, that were the vigilance of the Government authorities as active as it is supine, it is to be feared that to effectively arrest the traffic would be an operation of immense difficulty.[32]

Information about the central Sahara in general and about the slave trade in particular became more difficult to find once the Sultan's *firman* had been issued early in 1857. Slave-traders, as we have seen, were simply diverting their business from the main centres to more obscure roads and markets far from the prying eyes of British and other European consular officials, and beyond the range of European moral outrage. Because, apparently, it was assumed in London that the 1857 *firman* effectively ended the central Saharan slave trade, and the associated Mediterranean 'middle passage', no further yearly statistics of the traffic, either by land or by sea, were forwarded to the Foreign Office from the Tripoli consulate. Nor were there any further statistical reports on the trade from the vice consulates at Benghazi, Derna, Murzuk or Ghadames. The Ghadames post was anyway closed in 1860 and Murzuk the following year on the grounds that neither had been a commercial success. This was all part of a general British policy of retrenchment in the obscurer and less rewarding corners of the globe. Having decided that the River Niger did, after all, offer the best approach to inner western Africa, Great Britain was in effect abandoning its Saharan interests to France.[33] But all this meant that up-to-date statistical, political and economic information on the central Sahara became almost as difficult to find as it had been before the opening of the Murzuk and Ghadames vice consulates. The only occasional and not necessarily very reliable sources were western consular despatches or the eye-witness or hearsay accounts of passing European travellers.

Not all these European travellers were as well informed as the German traveller Gustav Nachtigal, who while in Tripoli in 1869, observed that the slave trade there, although still active had much fallen off:

> … nevertheless, there is still a considerable traffic in black human ware. As before, several slave caravans come to Tripoli every year; each year, however, the size of the caravans is diminishing, and instead of being taken into the town, the slaves are brought into the gardens of the Meshiya [Menscia] in order that they might be sold there gradually one by one.[34]

By then there were so many destitute liberated slaves in Tripoli that the extraordinary travelling Dutch heiress, Alexandrina Tinne, set up a refuge for them when she was there in 1868–69, preparing for her final and fatal Saharan journey.[35]

European visitors to Tripoli in the later nineteenth century made no mention of the visible slave trade that had always been a feature of the place up to 1857. But slave-trading continued quite openly in inland Tripolitania, in Fezzan, and especially in Cyrenaica. When the German traveller Gerhard Rohlfs was in Murzuk in 1865, he had found the slave trade still very active there, but slaves were no longer paraded and sold in the open street market, only in closed houses.[36] Rohlfs is quoted as claiming that over 4,000 slaves had been processed through Murzuk in 1864, which seems quite excessive in the light of Vice Consul Gagliuffi's figures for the 1840s and 1850s when the trade was still flourishing with official Turkish encouragement (see Chapter 6).[37] The difficulty with all such isolated figures is that they can be used to prove that the Fezzan trade was still highly active even in the 1860s. Rohlfs may, of course, have been right: it is not impossible that there was such slave traffic through Murzuk in that one year. But if so, it went against all the trends of that and previous decades.

Travelling through inland Tripolitania and Fezzan in 1869, Gustav Nachtigal found much evidence of continued slave-trading: 'We now met small slave caravans almost daily,' he wrote, 'obviously the slave trade was still flourishing.' In Murzuk he learned that the ordinance against the slave trade was ignored until the large yearly slave caravan had arrived and the tax on the slaves had been paid. Yet he estimated that the trade was only one-third its previous size.[38] By the time the British tourist Edward Rae was in Tripoli in 1877, the slave trade had apparently ended there and, according to this traveller, who did not go as far as Fezzan, also in Murzuk.[39] Much was done to end the residual trade in Tripolitania and Fezzan by the reforming governor, Ahmed Rassim Pasha, who held the post for a remarkable 15 years. If he did not wholly end the trade, there was little evidence of it by the time he finally left Tripoli in 1896, compared with the situation when he had first arrived in 1881.[40] The Porte itself expected him still to provide black 'servants', while African leaders were as usual sending gifts of slaves (including eunuchs) across the Sahara to Tripoli for onward shipment to Constantinople.

After abolition in Egypt in 1877 was made more effective by the British occupation of 1882, Cyrenaica remained the Saharan trade's only really

active North African outlet. Benghazi continued quietly to export slaves brought by the Sanusi-controlled road through Kufra and Augila from the Sultanate of Wadai (see Chapter 8). This outlet remained long in use. Thus in 1898 the British traveller Silva White found evidence that a contraband trade still flourished in the oasis of Siwa and in the Western Desert, mostly, he said, supplying boys from Wadai for the Egyptian and Constantinople markets.[41] And so it still was in 1906 when the German traveller Ewald Falls passed through the Western Desert. He found that the Turkish market was being supplied with 'the finest slaves' smuggled by night from Cyrenaica.[42] Also in 1906, the Swiss Hanns Vischer, who crossed the Sahara from Tripoli to Bornu with a caravan that included numbers of freed, home-bound slaves, discovered that the traders had at last stopped using the ancient and relatively easy main slaving road from Lake Chad, but were still carrying on an illegal, clandestine business by little-used tracks and the remoter oases. As he wrote, 'Slave caravans have now quite vanished on the road from Bornu to Tripoli [but] small numbers of slaves … no doubt frequently find their way through.'[43]

The slave traffic continued on some sections of the Wadai–Benghazi road well after Wadai's occupation by the French in 1909 and the Italian invasion of Cyrenaica in 1911. It was many years before France and Italy were in full control of their relative sectors of this highway. The French were not installed in Tibesti until 1929, while the Italians only finally occupied Fezzan in 1930 and Kufra in 1931. Ten years earlier Rosita Forbes, the first British traveller to reach Kufra, told how near Jalo (Augila), she had seen 'smuggled slave boys and girls of eight to ten years … solemn little beings with chubby black faces peering out of the pointed hood of minute camel's-hair burnuses'.[44] The Egyptian traveller Ahmed Hassanein Bey discovered at Kufra in 1923 that he could buy a slave girl for between £30 and £40 Sterling. The price had greatly increased since his travels in the Libyan Desert in 1916 when he had been offered a girl for as little as the equivalent of £5, 'because there were no more slaves coming up from Wadai on account of the French authorities in that province'.[45] Knud Holmboe, the travelling Danish Muslim who crossed Italian Libya in 1930, was told that slavery was then still endemic in Kufra and that a good slave girl could be bought for the equivalent of £15 Sterling at the big slave market held there every Thursday.[46] The Italians claim the credit for ending slavery and the slave trade in their Libyan possessions,[47] but black domestic slaves were still an undisguised feature of the wealthier Libyan households even in Benghazi well into the 1920s.[48]

With the decline of the slave trade, the natural poverty of the Sahara and of the Sudanese lands immediately to the south of it should have become more obvious to European powers with commercial and imperial ambitions there. Some did recognise the truth sooner than others: the British had in effect pulled out of the Sahara by 1860 to pursue more rewarding prospects in other parts of Africa. And the French diplomat Pierre Paul Gambon made the timely but disregarded remark in the 1880s that 'Without the slave trade, the commerce of the Sudan is not enough to supply the caravans. They

disappear everywhere a power opposed to slavery installs itself.'[49] Yet many then still believed that Timbuctu was the key to a great French empire on the River Niger to rival British India in power, wealth and prestige.

The heavy economic and social weight of Turkish rule in Fezzan, on top of the destruction caused by the Awlad Slaiman rebellion in the 1830s and '40s, was quite apparent by mid-century. When he was in Murzuk in 1850, Heinrich Barth lamented the already ruinous and depopulated state of the place; while his travelling companion, James Richardson, saw that many of the men were already migrating to escape heavy Turkish taxes.[50] In 1859 Consul Herman in Tripoli wrote of 'the almost total cessation of the Caravan Trade of the Interior since the abolition of the slave Trade'. Two years later he was reporting to London that 'the state of the Fezzan is most deplorable', with heavy emigration.[51] The young French explorer Henri Duveyrier complained in 1864 that the province was in a 'great state of decadence' with the able-bodied men moving away to Algeria or the Sudan.[52]

Britain, after all, withdrew from the central Sahara around 1860 because its commercial prospects were by then considered so poor. And so they were when compared, for instance, with the developing trade on the lower Niger where the 'legitimate' substitute for trans-Atlantic slaving, Liverpool's new palm oil business, was already worth some £400,000/year by 1840, well before the opening of the upriver trade.[53] Yet the 'legitimate' Saharan traffic in ivory, ostrich feathers, hides and skins, made some spectacular, if irregular, progress in the second half of the nineteenth century. Here was the morally acceptable alternative to the slave trade that abolitionists had been advocating since the late eighteenth century. During some successful years, this licit trade seemed to prove that the abolitionists had been right all along. But the whole system was to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions and outside competition around the end of the nineteenth century. Miège believes this 'legitimate' business reached a peak in the decade 1870–1880. There was no steady rise in trade, for there were long setbacks in 1854–59, with slow progress in 1860–72, and a strong surge in 1873–80. There was a deep recession in 1881–92, a slight recovery in 1894–1900, and a swift, final decline thereafter.[54] According to the British Consul in Turkish Tripoli at the beginning of the twentieth century, T.S. Jago, the total ten-year value of the port's Saharan re-exports reached a peak of £1.8 million in 1872–81 nearly a six-fold increase over the previous decade.[55] By the the last decades of the century, the main items of Saharan trade through Tripoli were ivory (up to 1875), ostrich feathers (up to 1885), and hides and skins thereafter.

Saharan merchants who struggled in the later nineteenth century to stay in business without trafficking in slaves faced many difficulties. Abolition of the slave trade itself had deprived them of the most profitable part of their enterprise, and the one that on many desert crossings made the difference between a worthwhile and a worthless undertaking. Then, from at least the 1850s onwards, the traditional Saharan trading system – inefficient, hazardous, under-capitalised and apparently incapable of much change or development

(apart from its choice of routes and markets) – began to feel the full weight of European competition, of the century's globalising trends. This came first with the opening of the River Niger and its tributaries to steam-powered commercial navigation, and then with the expansion of West African shipping lines and ports, followed by the advance of colonial railways into the interior. As early as 1855 the explorer Edvard Vogel noted that ivory traders on the Niger were 'anxiously awaiting the arrival of the English steamer' because they hoped for much better prices by trading through this new means of river and ocean transport than could be had by sending their goods 30 days' journey up-country to Kano, and thence across the Sahara to Tripoli.[56] By 1910 a parcel of goods was more quickly, securely and cheaply delivered by rail and sea from Kano to Tripoli via Lagos and Liverpool than across the desert by caravan.[57] Obviously, such competition was felt most strongly on the western Saharan roads, while the Wadai road, crossing some of the remotest parts of the eastern Sahara, only came indirectly under such pressures with the development of modern trade and transport to and within the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

At the same time, the Saharan traffic in ivory, feathers, hides and skins could not escape the impact of international market forces. With the opening up of sub-Saharan Africa towards the end of the century, easier and better sources of such produce could be exploited. Not all traders used to traditional ways were able to adapt to the modern world, and especially not to the fluctuating demands of European and American markets and fashions, and greater exposure to the European economic climate. It has been suggested that one of the main causes of the Saharan trade crisis of the 1880s was the European recession of 1878–84.[58]

Almost the last blow to Tripoli's role in the ancient trade of the Sahara came with the depredations of the Sudanese military slaving-adventurer, Rabih Fadlallah, between Wadai and Bornu in 1879–1900, and in particular Tripoli merchants' losses in the sack of the Bornu capital, Kukawa, in 1893 and the resultant two-year closure of the Bornu–Murzuk road (see Chapter 10). Nahum Slouschz, a Jewish visitor to Tripoli in 1906, counted only eight merchant houses still trading with the Sudan, and by 1909 there were even fewer.[59] In 1910 Hanns Vischer wrote how 'Murzuk has now lost its last source of income and the Turkish administration of today is faced with the difficult problem of the confidence of the people in the value of their own country independent of the Arab trans-Saharan trade.'[60] It was a problem that only began to be temporarily solved with the discovery and exploitation of oil in the independent Libyan Kingdom from the 1950s onwards.

* * *

Even in the rather more 'advanced' political and social milieu of Tunisia, the progress of slavery and slave trade abolition after Ahmed Bey's initial decrees of the 1840s (see Chapter 5) was not smooth. Indeed, the failure of later Beys to eradicate slavery entirely was one of the justifications cited by

France in imposing the protectorate in 1881. And as late as 1890 it was still considered necessary to decree penal sanctions for buying, selling or keeping slaves, although such practices were by then largely confined to the unruly pre-Saharan south. In Algeria, and especially in its vast hinterland, the French were for decades unable to convince the Islamic leadership of the benign intentions behind their original anti-slavery measures of 1848.[61]

Successive Moroccan sultans, as mentioned, proved more adept than other Islamic leaders at resisting international abolitionist pressures. The empire and its undefined hinterland as a result remained until at least the beginning of the twentieth century the largest slave-owning society in North Africa west of Egypt, and still a market of some importance for replacement black slaves delivered across the desert. There were slight concessions and reforms to please the abolitionists in the nineteenth century. A decree of 1863, for instance, gave maltreated slaves the theoretical right to some redress.[62] But the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was so concerned about the situation in the empire, and particularly the use of eunuchs, that it set up a branch office in Tangier.

The Moroccans themselves still defended the institution of slavery on the grounds that it was largely domestic and therefore benign. As one minister was quoted as explaining to Consul Drummond Hay in 1884, 'They are acquired with a view to domestic service, to do those tasks that women in a state of seclusion are not in a position to undertake'.[63] While this may have been true as far as it went (and ignoring the fact that many owners of domestic slaves were not always benign), it overlooked the many other roles filled by slaves of both sexes in which their sexual availability and their skilled and unskilled labour could be ruthlessly exploited. Moroccan slavery may indeed have been not so much an economic necessity as 'an institution and a tradition based on custom.[64] But such defensive justification ignores many of the harder realities of slavery, domestic or otherwise, and especially the way slaves had been procured and lost their freedom in the first place, and had then been delivered and sold to final owners who knew, or cared, nothing of their recent experiences. For few slave-owning Moroccan town-dwellers had ever seen a Saharan slave caravan, or witnessed the degradation and exploitation of black slave labour in the plantations of the south. For both in Islam and in the Americas, town-based slaves were usually much better treated than those on the plantations.

It has been argued that historians' benign attitude towards Islamic slavery in Morocco 'is derived largely from a contextual and historical reading of Islamic legal texts regarding the status and practice of slavery'. Slaves were defined and marked out within the host society not just by class (only a very few rose to the higher social ranks) but by their visible and cultural differences, by their *négritude*, in the modern sense. For the type of military slavery practised on a large scale in Morocco as far back as the seventeenth century had provided 'the foundation for a society divided first by skin colour and then by race'.[65]

At the Brussels international anti-slavery conference of 1889–90 (inspired by that leading abolitionist, Cardinal Lavigerie of France), the main European powers agreed to a series of measures against the *internal* African trade. But little attention was paid to the situation in Morocco. The issues of its large class of domestic slaves and the trans-Saharan trade that still, if on a much-reduced scale, supplied and replenished it, were all but ignored.[66] In 1898, under further British pressure, the government had to renew a clearly ineffective earlier order against the public sale of slaves in the seaports of the empire, sales visible to the prying eyes of European officials that also occasionally attracted European buyers.[67] Only in 1905 were there similar prohibitions in the inland towns, and the important Marrakesh market stayed open a few years more.

When they set up their protectorate in 1912, the French took few effective measures against slavery, although the Resident-General, Louis-Hubert Lyautey, did promptly close down the Marrakesh market with its 'unseemly exhibitions' of human merchandise. Rather than confront the problem directly, the French preferred to let evolving social perceptions, family pressures and economic constraints bring about the necessary changes. The Saharan trade had by then all but ceased, at least to the extent of no longer openly delivering gangs of young black trade slaves into the Moroccan heartlands. This (as we have seen) had come about largely because the trade was no longer an economically viable or socially acceptable business, and not as a result of any specific abolitionist pressure.

Only in 1922 was the Moroccan slave trade formally abolished by a residential circular that admitted that this did not mean the end of slavery itself: 'it is impossible for us, for the gravest considerations of Muslim policy, to interfere in the private life of families.'[68] Slavery thus continued to have formal legal recognition under the protectorate, which ended with Moroccan independence in 1956. Buyers had still been supplied with kidnapped black boys and girls smuggled up from the south. As French visitors to Fez remarked in 1930, 'what is most striking to a foreigner in the houses … is the multitudes of slaves … as you enter the abode you encounter idle slaves everywhere'.[69]

The decrees of the protectorate had no effect in the territories beyond French or Spanish control. Thus there was still a minor, but active slave trade to Tindouf until that oasis finally fell to French forces in 1934. Slavery, and a small trade supplying it, were endemic in wide areas of the western Sahara under French or less effective Spanish military control. In the mid-1950s the British journalist John Lodwick was told by a Spanish officer in the Rio de Oro that slave caravans from Senegal were still passing through the inland district of Smara: 'It is difficult for us [the Spanish authorities] to prove anything; all the more so since the French are supremely anxious to see nothing proved at all.'[70] For the fact of the matter was that the European colonial powers preferred to ignore and even condone the institution of

slavery (and perhaps even a little clandestine trade) through much of Saharan and Sahelian Africa.[71]

Such attitudes lasted even after the great wave of independence washed over Africa around 1960. 'Slavery continued to exist in countries south of the Sahara despite the stated abolitionist concerns of their new governments.'[72] The most notorious survival of slavery on a national scale was in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania where by 1980 it had already been abolished for the third time in the twentieth century. There 'the mental state of slavery' persists in a hierarchical society through 'arrogance on the part of the former masters … and subservience on the part of the … slaves and manumitted slaves'.[73] But Mauritania is perhaps unfairly criticised for practices and attitudes that, whether or not they were largely suppressed elsewhere in the twentieth century, were certainly reviving at the end of that century in sahelian Africa, from the deeply troubled Sudan Republic in the east to southern Morocco in the far west.

The Saharan slave trade and North African slavery have left a legacy of residual pools of *nègritude*, of mixed communities showing black slave origins to a greater or lesser extent. At the end of the twentieth century, black peoples, including Moors with a strong admixture of negro blood, formed about one-quarter of Moorish society in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the Western (ex-Spanish) Sahara and southern Morocco There were similar mixed communities in other parts of the middle and southern Sahara, notably in the oases of Fezzan. In the west, at least, there was often little distinction in practice between 'free' *harratin* and slaves (*abid*) for many *harratin* still served former masters out of habit, fear or lack of other occupations. They accepted their inferior status so long as they were well treated and protected.[74]

These communities were not always well assimilated, even in the towns. Slaves became Muslims, not necessarily because they were forced to do so, but mainly through the moral pressure of their fellow-slaves. But an old ex-slave has been quoted as saying 'Nevertheless, all of us, deep in our hearts, clung to our ancestral customs.'[75] It has been suggested that 'the separate nature of West African, particularly Hausa, communities in cities like Tripoli and Tunis, indicate that slaves were not assimilated there'.[76] Thus the free black people of Tripoli and Benghazi used to live apart from the host community in suburban villages remarkable for their 'Sudanic' appearance of small round huts with pointed straw roofs. The British tourist Edward Rae, when in Turkish Tripoli about 1877, considered the negro settlement in the oasis outside the town to have been 'a perfect village from the heart of central Africa'.[77] The Italian authorities demolished these settlements on public health grounds soon after the occupation of 1911, but up to then they had provided former slaves and their descendants with a venue for their traditional pagan practices of inner Africa under a superficial layer of Islam.[78]

In the 1930s the Italian anthropologist Ester Panetta studied some of the unorthodox religious practices of the marginalised black communities of Italian Libya, and especially their night-long ritual dances in which both sexes took part. Some of these dances were composed, solemn exercises intended to placate the spirits, others were frankly erotic; all were tolerated by the Islamic religious authorities.[79]

These communities of former slaves continued to practice pagan-animist possession cults, including the Hausa *bori* and the Songhai *holey* and cults of purification and healing through sacrifice, overlaid with a certain superficial Islam, until well into the twentieth century.[80] (There were, of course, similar survivals and adaptations of African belief and practice among the supposedly Christian slaves of Haiti, Brazil and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America.) While seemingly the Islamic authorities in North Africa were tolerant of the blacks' perceived mystical skills, their special talents as healers and exorcisers were acknowledged and appreciated by a local populace whose own religious beliefs and observances often reflected pre-Islamic origins.[81]

13 Conclusions

I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.
William Cowper

Compared with the monstrous Atlantic traffic, the slave trade across the Sahara was never a large business, on a year-by-year basis. At its most active, probably in the mid-nineteenth century, it might have carried 8,000 slaves/year to North African markets. The Atlantic trade in the 1780s, by contrast, was shipping more than ten times (nearly 90,000) as many black slaves every year to the American and Caribbean plantations.[1] But the Saharan trade, a mainstay of Maghrebi economies for over a thousand years, was remarkably enduring. From its beginnings as a regular business in the seventh century up to the twentieth, the desert trade consigned many millions of black slaves to servitude in the Maghreb, or to other Mediterranean destinations. Estimates of the grand total of live slave transits of the Sahara up to the year 1500 range from a maximum of nearly 6 million (Mauny) to 4.32 million (Austen) down to about 3.5 million (Wright) (see Table 3.1). It is then suggested that between 1500 and the beginning of the twentieth century the trade continued as shown in Table 13.1.

All these figures, even those for the nineteenth century, are estimates, informed guesses; and in the light of more recent research, Raymond Mauny's pioneering statistics now seem far too high. All numbers are based on the few reliable numbers that have come down from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; before that all was obscurity, illuminated only by a very rare shaft of statistical light. But it does seem reasonable nevertheless to suggest that between 6 and 7 million black African slaves – men, women and children – were delivered alive across the Sahara to North Africa over a span of some 1,250 years, at an average rate over the centuries of around 5,000/year. These people were destined for servitude in the Maghreb, with perhaps 1,000–1,500 of them every year taken through the Western Desert to Egypt or shipped across the Mediterranean. The Atlantic trade, by

Table 13.1 Some estimates of Saharan slave transits: Average yearly numbers

Century	*Mauny*[a]	*Austen*[b]	*Wright*
1500–99	20,000	5,500	6,000
1600–99	20,000	7,100	7,000
1700–99	20,000	6,000	7,000
1800–99	20,000	6,450	6,000
1900 on	—	—	few hundred
Annual average	20,000	6,263	6,500
Sub-total	8,000,000	2,505,000	2,600,000
Total (750–1500)[c]	5,700,000	4,320,000	3,450,000
Grand total	13,700,000	6,825,000	6,050,000
Annual average (650–1900)	10,960	5,460	4,840

Notes
a Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique noire*, pp. 240–1.
b Austen, 'The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census' in Gemery and Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market*, p. 66; 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade out of Africa: A Tentative Census' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, Table 2.
c See Table 3.1.

contrast, moved a total of perhaps twice as many black slaves, perhaps two-and-a-half times as many, to the Americas and the Caribbean in the mere four centuries of its existence.

Doubts have been expressed about the purpose of such numbers. There are the methodological difficulties of making sense of rarely available slaving statistics; and then there are the moral and ideological implications. Were those who brought more slaves across the Atlantic or the Sahara 'worse' than those who brought fewer: as always seems to be the case with Britain and the Atlantic trade? Are the Tebu slave-drivers of the central Sahara to be considered more 'guilty' because they habitually lost more of their trade slaves through gross mistreatment and improvident provisioning than the more benign Tuareg?

Yet numbers and the comparisons they allow are important. For how else is the size and extent of this trade to be known? – not so much as a measure of human greed and wickedness (as if they can be measured), but as an economic and social feature of the North African and other slave-owning communities it supplied, apparently with remarkable regularity, from the early Middle Ages until the twentieth century. One modern historian has argued that 'History is to a considerable extent a matter of numbers … Numbers count in history'.[2] So it is that consular statistics from Tripoli and Tangier in the eighteenth century and also from Benghazi, Murzuk, Ghadames and elsewhere in the nineteenth, do provide a foundation of reasonably plausible and consistent facts on the central Saharan slave trade. On this basis, and with the help of other sources, it is possible to make some estimate of the likely size of the Saharan trade as a whole in the mid-

nineteenth century especially, but also to a limited extent in earlier times as well. For, as has already been mentioned, this was largely a traditional and unchanging business so severely constrained by its physical, economic and other limitations that it probably hardly changed its methods, its size or its productivity over a span of a thousand years and more. It thus seems reasonable to project the available statistics from more recent times back into the past to arrive at some plausible estimates of the trade in earlier centuries.

Yet one difficulty with these largely static annual average figures is that they assume a fairly constant demand for slaves from one year to the next in the main Maghrebi receiving markets. The implication is that the trade continued to supply slaves at more or less the same yearly rate regardless of fluctuating populations, political fortunes, purchasing power and other unstable factors in the main slave-buying societies of North Africa and the Muslim Mediterranean world. The answer may be, of course, that the trade never fully satisfied the demand for black slaves, and that ready buyers would always have been found for even greater imports. For, as already mentioned, this was largely a *replacement* trade, replenishing the stock of slaves who had recently died without issue or who had been freed. The 'service life' (the time between final sale and death or manumission) of a young black slave brought to North Africa has been estimated at only seven years Thus, even extending this period of useful service to ten years, the implication is that the trade provided a completely new slave pool at least once every decade, and that the size of this pool remained more or less constant. A yearly average import of around 5,000 slaves into North Africa as a whole, with perhaps 1,000 of them re-exported across the Mediterranean, suggests that the entire black slave population of the Maghreb might have been only around 40,000 in a host population numbering perhaps 3–5 million in the year 1500 and perhaps about the same even in 1800. Most of the black slaves would have been in Morocco, the most populous Maghrebi country, and the one with the greatest purchasing power. The 150,000-strong black slave army built up by the Sultan Moulay Ismael around the year 1700 was only a short-lived phenomen.

Of the several themes emerging from this study, perhaps the strongest is exploitation – the unrelenting exploitation of the natural resources, and particularly the human resources, of inner Africa by fellow-Africans. Such exploitation has continued for century after century, with no reversal of fortune, and no apparent risk of any. There is no doubt that slaves were *consumed* by the societies that used them. From the first enslavement until (and perhaps even after) final adoption into distant and alien host-cultures, climates and disease environents, they were grievously misused, mishandled and sometimes allowed to die in ways and numbers that reflected the sheer prolific abundance and cheapness of the original sources of supply. Slaves' exploitation, for whatever purpose, was a constant process, barely relieved by the most benign treatment in Islamic domestic environments, not even by manumission and, more rarely, by the chance to return across Africa to a home, family and community that probably still existed only in the returnees'

imaginations. Black slaves had no outside power to care for or to protect them, whereas gross mistreatment of Christian slaves in Barbary always risked active retribution from nearby Europe, or worse sufferings for the many Muslim slaves held in Malta, Italy and elsewhere.[3]

The system of African slavery, and especially the export of slaves across the Sahara and the Mediterranean, was crude consumption of the continent's raw natural resources. These young trade slaves, most of them unimproved and unrefined, (apart, perhaps. from a smattering of Islam and Arabic) thus lacked much 'value added' element. (One notable exception was the making and trading of eunuchs.) Certainly the trade slave – untrained, unaccomplished and hardly attractive, but the staple of the Saharan system – was not worth much, not even by contemporary world standards: perhaps £10 to £15 Sterling each at Murzuk or Tindouf in the mid-nineteenth century, rather more at Tripoli or Marrakesh. By contrast, the capital value of the English railway navvy – that prodigy of hard, physical labour – was in the 1840s put at £245 Sterling at the age of only 20 and £350 in his fully skilled prime, at age 30, These were the estimates of Edwin Chadwick, reforming barrister and civil servant, who wrote, 'In general, every adult trained labourer may be said to be, in this pecuniary point of view, as valuable as two hunters, or two race horses, or a pair of first rate carriage horses.'[4] Or, Chadwick might have added, between 25 and 35 raw trade slaves at a Saharan mart: even in this instance, it is notable how the centuries-old African exchange rate of about 15 black slaves for one good horse still applied.

The whole Saharan slaving enterprise seemed indeed to beg the question *cui bono?* – who gained from it? Sure, those engaged in the trade set their prices and took their profits, if only after prodigious risks, efforts and hardships on their own part. The garden, herding and domestic economies of the Saharan oases and encampments, the plantations of Cyrenaica and southern Morocco, and the urban societies of Mediterranean North Africa and the Levant no doubt gained some considerable benefit from the black slave labour other members of society could not or would not do. Their owners no doubt gained ornament and pleasure from black slave concubines. Some black slave women, indeed, may well have considered themselves better off in North African or Levantine domestic bondage than nominally free in their own communities deep in tropical Africa.

Yet what other benefits, and particularly long-term economic and financial benefits, did the Saharan slave trade confer on those societies and communities most deeply involved in it? It certainly offered no means of achieving what R.H. Tawney has termed 'a continuous and unlimited increase in material wealth which modern societies applaud as meritorious'.[5] The old, walled-city of Tripoli can show little from its physical past to suggest that its role in the black Saharan slave trade had, even relatively, anything like the impact that the Atlantic slave trade had on the prosperity, growth and capital accumulations of Bristol or Liverpool, Nantes or Bordeaux, with all the associated implications for the long-term, self-sustaining economic develop-

ment of Britain and France, respectively. The oasis of Ghadames may still impress the tourist as a remarkable example of business enterprise and civic order in a hostile environment. But there is little evidence that the gains of its merchants from the slave trade ever provided them with more than bourgeois domestic comforts and some risk capital that apparently soon melted away under the harsher economic pressures and Turkish tax demands of the later nineteenth century. In this context, perhaps one of the most significant remarks by a foreign traveller in the Regency of Tripoli was that by James Hamilton, who in 1852 had learned that the slave-traders of the oasis of Augila had no means of spending the large sums they had amassed from their business.[6] Was it then the case that profits from the trade could be devoted only to financing the nest season's slave-trading, since there were no other investment opportunities? Further research may however confirm that the capital accumulations of individual slave-traders were soon dispersed and lost in the later nineteenth century in the vain attempt to substitute (to the abolitionist) morally acceptable but (to the trader) even more risky dealing in 'legitimate' produce for the more reliable profits of the slave trade.

Another theme running through the whole story of European involvement in the Sahara from the late eighteenth century can be summed up as delusion. Travellers and explorers, consular officials and business agents, as well as those in Europe who recruited, directed and encouraged them, failed in some cases for over a century to come to terms with and understand the peculiar conditions of the Maghreb and the Sahara. Worse still, simple delusions about the peoples and societies on the far side of the desert, the supposed ready opportunities they offered for slavery and slave trade abolition, for two-way 'legitimate' trade and the spreading of enlightenment and 'civilisation', made the central and western Sudan appear as important, indeed necessary, goals for expansion, and eventually for full-scale imperialism. The British at least realised in good time that, with some exceptions, the Sudan had (as it still has) the poorest of natural environments. The French, positively encouraged by their main European rivals to imperial expansion in the less rewarding parts of Africa, deluded themselves until the twentieth century that French West and Equatorial Africa, suitably impressive on the map, were worthwhile possessions. The Italians still imagined in 1911 that by seizing Turkish Tripolitania and Cyrenaica they were gaining control of the great high road to Lake Chad and all the rich trade that they believed flowed along it from the heart of Africa.

Attempts in the meantime to abolish the Saharan slave trade were so difficult because those engaged in it – and that directly or indirectly included Ottoman government officials in Tripoli, Benghazi and elsewhere – simply could not share European moral repugnance for such activities. They were sanctioned by Islam, by time, necessity and, at least until the Sultan's *firman* of 1857, by the state. The gains were anyway too great and demand for slaves still too pressing for the trade and slavery to be lightly abandoned.[7] The whole issue of abolition in the Ottoman Empire and its provinces, as in

Morocco and elsewhere, brought to the forefront the diametrically opposed attitudes of Europeans on the one hand and Turkish, Maghrebi and African Muslims on the other to an issue that had only begun to trouble an appreciable number of largely middle-class European consciences since the beginning of the century. But once troubled, those European, and particularly British, consciences soon made of abolition an ideology that would accept no compromise, but expected complete obedience to its demands on the part of slavers and slave-owners, wherever they were. In North Africa, at least, there was little direct confrontation between the two ideologies of slavery and its abolition: the clash of culture and religion was muted and the locals, where and when they could, evaded what they saw as unjust pressures put upon them by, as we have seen, diverting the slave traffic into the lesser byways of the Sahara and the less regulated Mediterranean outlets.

Thus the Wadai road through the eastern Sahara to Benghazi and some of the western roads to Morocco were able to endure as slaving arteries up to the twentieth century because they were well beyond the reach of European moral outrage. The Turks to the east, like the Moroccans in the west, felt no need to interfere in a trade from which they also gained much benefit. On the Wadai road the trade was primarily an economic and social activity of the Sanusi confraternity. That order had sought its own refuge from hostile outside pressures and influences in the most hidden quarters of the eastern Sahara and Sudan (where some oases were not 'discovered' and mapped until the 1920s) where its own moral judgements about slavery and the slave trade were still unchallenged. It had done so in accordance with the Islamic tradition (starting with the Prophet himself) of migration and flight (in the spiritual as well as the physical sense) when the *Dar al-Islam* was believed to be under intolerable outside pressure, such as European economic, social and ideological penetration.[8] Thus one of the most effective local responses to the European anti-slavery impulse as it was felt throughout much of northern Africa by the second half of the nineteenth century was to acquiesce where necessary, but quietly to dissimulate, divert and defy wherever and whenever such evasive action was feasible. And the colonial powers – which meant the French in particular – were in their turn not prepared to provoke opposition and social unrest by insisting on too rigid obedience to their own abolitionist regulations. The Protectorate authorities duly acknowledged their own limitations in this sensitive social area in the 1922 decree formally abolishing the Moroccan slave trade (see Chapter 12).

Now, nearly a century later, and on the two-hundredth anniversary of British slave trade abolition in 2007, it seems that the work of the abolitionists, at least in Sudanic, Sahelian and West Africa, is being undone as war, civil strife, and economic pressure encourage the re-emergence of slavery and bondage, if not slave-trading. The international anti-slavery movement, which has been concentrating on other forms of human exploitation and trafficking, will no doubt again be devoting more of its efforts and resources to its original objectives in Africa.

Notes

1 Slaves, slavery and the Sahara

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2 P.E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery. A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, l983), p. 5. For further discussions, see S. Miers and I. Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), pp. 14ff.

3 J. Keenan, *The Tuareg: People of the Ahaggar* (London, Sickle Moon (reprint), 2002), pp. 96–7.

4 O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 4, 46.

5 J.R. Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Africa* (2 Vols, London, Frank Cass, 1985), *Vol. I: Islam and the Ideology of Enslavement* p. 3; see also Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, pp. 15, 21.

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9 R.A. Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade out of Africa: A Tentative Census' in E. Savage (ed.), *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (London, Frank Cass, 1992), p. 214; R.A. Austen, 'The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census' in H.A. Gemery and J.S. Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, Academic Press, 1979), pp. 47–50 and Table 2.5.

10 D.B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 47.

11 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. 15–16.

12 H.J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa* (London, Hurst, 2001), pp. 138–294.

13 M. Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York, New Amsterdam, 1989), p. 79.

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25 J.C. Baroja, *Estudios Saharianos*, (Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Saharianos, 1955), p. 317; J. Mercer, *Spanish Sahara* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1976), pp. 154–5.

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28 A.G.B. Fisher and H.J. Fisher, *Slavery and Muslim Society in Africa*, (London, Hurst, 1970), p. 82.

29 Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, pp. 15ff.

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33 J. Chapelle, *Nomades noirs du Sahara: les Toubous* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1982), p. 378; G. Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan* (4 Vols, trans. and ed. by A.G.B. Fisher and H.J. Fisher, London, Hurst, 1971–88) *Vol. I: Fezzan and Tibesti*, p. 402.

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Central Africa to Timbuctoo and across the Great Desert to Morocco Performed in the Years 1824–1828 (2 Vols, London, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), Vol. 2, pp. 89, 109, 114; J. Bruce-Lockhart and J.Wright (eds), *Difficult and Dangerous Roads: Hugh Clapperton's Travels in Sahara and Fezzan 1823–1825*, (London, Sickle Moon, 2000), pp. 257–301, 339–42.

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3 The medieval Saharan slave trade

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8 Thiry, *Le Sahara Libyen*, p. 58.
9 F. Renault, 'Problèmes et recherche sur la traite transsaharienne et orientale en Afrique' in S. Daget (ed.) *De la traite à l'ésclavage: actes du colloque international sur la traite des Noirs, Nantes, 1985* (2 Vols, Paris/Nantes, Centre de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Monde Atlantique/Société Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, 1988), pp. 40–1; Thiry, *Le Sahara Libyen*, pp. 107–9.
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54 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, p. 42; Cuoq, *Recueil*, pp. 48–9.
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95 J. Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission to Central Africa Performed in the Years 1850–51 etc.* (2 Vols, London, Chapman and Hall, 1853), Vol. I, p. 10.
96 For the intercontinental importance of the trans-Saharan gold trade in the Middle Ages, see Bovill, *The Golden Trade*, pp. 106–7; Mauny, *Tableau géographique*, pp. 361–6, 375–7; Hopkins, *An Economic History*, p. 82.
97 The *Civet Cat* was a common sign of perfumers' shops in eighteenth-century London, while *The Civet Cat and Three Herrings* was the sign of a prominent Smithfield chemist and druggist *c.*1760. See A. Heal, *Sign Boards of Old London Shops* (London, Batsford, 1957), pp. 45, 147. For a description of how civet musk was obtained, see the account of Simon Lucas in *Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa* (2 Vols, London, G. and W. Nicol, 1810), Vol. I, pp. 159–60.
98 Lyon, *A Narrative of Travels*, p. 154.
99 P.E. Lovejoy, *Salt of the Desert Sun. A History of Salt Production and Trade in the Central Sahara* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 10–11.

100 Law, *The Horse*, pp. 121–3.
101 P. Huard, 'Introduction et diffusion du fer au Tchad', *JAH*, VII, No.3, 1966, p. 387.
102 Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 7, 12.
103 M Milanesi, *Giovanni Battista Ramusio, Navigazioni e Viaggi* (7 Vols, Turin, Einaudi, 1978), Vol. I, *La descrizione dell'Africa di Giovan Lioni Africano*, p. 386.
104 Fisher and Fisher, *Slavery and Muslim Society*, pp. 76–82.
105 Cuoq, *Recueil*, pp. 338–9.
106 R. Mauny, *Les navigations médiévales sur les cotes sahariennes antérieures à la découverte portugaise (1434)* (Lisbon, Centro de Estudos Historicos Ultramarinos, 1960), p. 21 and n. 94, quoting T. Monod.
107 For the horrors of waterless travel in the Sahara with a large northbound slave caravan, see Caillié, *Travels through Central Africa.* Vol. II, pp. 108–19.
108 I. Droandi, *Notizie sul cammello* (Tripoli, Governo della Tripolitania, Stato Maggiore, 1915), pp. 133–4.
109 Hopkins, *An Economic History*, pp. 82–3.
110 Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. I, pp. 108–10; Vol. II, p. 146; R. Hallett, *Records of the African Association, 1788–1831* (Edinburgh, Nelson, 1964), pp. 187–9; Richardson, *Travels in the Great Desert of Sahara*, Vol. II, p. 359; the Swiss traveller Jean Louis Burckhardt died in Cairo in 1816 after waiting in vain for several years for a caravan to take him to Fezzan and so into inner Africa: see J.L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London, African Association/John Murray, 1819), pp. lxiii, lxxxiv.
111 National Archives (formerly Public Record Office), Kew, London: Foreign Office Papers: FO 101/16, J. Richardson report, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert*, Tripoli, 11th May 1846.
112 Mauny, *Tableau géographique*, pp. 356–7.
113 De la Roncière, *Déouverte*, pp. 145, 151; 'The Letter of Antoine Malfante' in G.R. Crone (trans. and ed.) *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other Documents on West Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century* (London, Hakluyt, 1937), pp. 85–90.
114 G.T. Stride and C. Ifeka, *Peoples and Empires of West Africa: West Africa in History, 1000–1800* (London, Nelson, 1971), p. 170.
115 R.A. Austen, *African Economic History; Internal Development and External Dependency* (London, James Currey, 1987), p. 41.
116 Conclusions he drew from the discussions at *The Workshop on the Long Distance Trade in Slaves across the Sahara and the Black Sea in the Nineteenth Century* at the Rockefeller Center, Bellagio, Italy, 10th–16th December 1988; see F. Renault, 'Colloque sur la traite transsaharienne', *Africa* [Rome], Anno XLIV, giugno 1989, pp. 295–6.
117 H. Duveyrier, *Les Touareg du Nord* (Paris, Challamel, 1864), p. 259.
118 F. Renault, *Le traite des noirs au Proche Orient médiéval, VIIe–XIVe siècles* (Paris, Geuthner, 1989), pp. 69–70.
119 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, p. 42.
120 As the value of the *ducat* (gold or silver) varied in place and time, accurate estimates of such statements are not possible.
121 E. Francesca, *Teoria e pratica del commercio nell'Islam medievale: I contratti di vendita e di commenda nel diritto ibadita* (Rome, Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 2002), pp. 105, 184–5.
122 Milanesi, *Giovanni Battista Ramusio, Vol. I, Le navigazioni di Alvise Ca' da Mosto e Pietro di Sintra*, p. 511.
123 Lyon, *A Narrative of Travels*, pp. 121, 130, 154.
124 Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol. I, pp. 301–46.

125 R. Mauny, *Les siècles obscurs de l'Afrique noire, histoire et archéologie* (Paris, Fayard, 1970), pp. 240–1; *Tableau géographique*, p. 379.
126 Austen, 'The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade', p. 66.

4 The land ways and the sea ways

1 Mauny, *Les navigations*, pp. 94–6; J.R.S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 149–50; B.W. Diffie and G.D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415–1580* (Minneapolis, MN, Minnesota University Press, 1977), pp. 27–31, 60–62. The island of Lanzarote is of course named after the Genoese navigator Lancelotto Malocello.
2 Mauny, *Les navigations*, pp. 74–7; Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion*, p. 152; Diffie and Winius, *Foundations*, pp. 36–7, 103, 159.
3 Bovill, *The Golden Trade*, pp. 24, 87–8.
4 Mauny, *Les navigations*, pp. 1–18.
5 Diffie and Winius, *Foundations*, p. 81.
6 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, p. 23.
7 Milanesi, *Giovanni Battista Ramusio, Vol. I, Le navigazioni di Alvise Ca' da Mosto e Pietro di Sintra*, p. 495; Crone, *The Voyages of Cadamosto*, p. 28. On the Western Sahara, the sixteenth-century Portuguese poet Luis de Camoes had harsh words for the coastlands 'separating Barbary from Ethiopia' where there was extreme want, the people never tasted fresh water, there was not enough pasture for their flocks, and the very birds (ostriches?) had iron in their bellies. *Os Lusiads*, Canto V, 6.
8 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, pp. 58–9.
9 The name 'Guinea' derives from the Berber for 'Land of the Blacks' and is thus a synonym for Sudan, Niger, Mauritania and Ethiopia.
10 Venice, 1550. The first half of this first volume contained *La descrizione dell'Africa* by Leo Africanus.
11 The direct distance is about 400 miles, about two to three weeks' travel for a big slave caravan.
12 Milanesi, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, pp. 486, 487, 511.
13 Ibid., pp. 503–4; 515.
14 The Venetian *ducat* was 2.147 grams of gold. Cadamosto seems therefore to have paid nearly 650 grams of gold for his seven horses.
15 Diffie and Winius, *Foundations*, p. 315.
16 Milanesi, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, p. 486.
17 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, Table 2.3.
18 But see Mercer, *Spanish Sahara*, p. 93.
19 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, Table 3.1.
20 For background to these developments, see R. Gargiulo, *La battaglia di Lepanto, 7 ottobre 1571* (Pordenone, Biblioteca dell'Imagine, 2004), *passim.*
21 Barbary: the coastal states of North Africa west of Egypt, a term derived from the Arabic *Al-Barbar*, Berbers (*OED*).
22 Bono, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo*, pp. 193–4; see also H.G. Barnby, *The Prisoners of Algiers* (London, Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 23.
23 Barnby, *The Prisoners*, pp. 43–4.
24 Pennell, *Piracy and Diplomacy*, pp. 45, 52.
25 Fisher, 'The Eastern Maghreb', p. 259.
26 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, Table 2; Rossi, *Storia di Tripoli*, p. 185.
27 For details of the treaty, see El-Hesnawi, *Fezzan under the Rule*, pp. 118–19. The *mithqal* in gold was one *dinar* of 4.72 grams (Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, p. 481); the gold value of all the annual tribute was thus nearly 19 kg.

28 Lyon, *Narrative*, pp. 3–4. In 1798–9 the German traveller Friedrich Hornemann reported from Murzuk that the amount of the tribute had previously been $6,000, but had by then been reduced to $4,000 (Bovill, *Missions to the Niger*, Vol. I, p. 100).
29 Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p. 47; W.F. Cook, *The Hundred Years War for Morocco: Gunpowder and the Military Revolution in the Early Modern Muslim World* (Oxford, Westview Press, 1994), p. 258, calls it 'a textbook gunpowder conquest'; Bovill, *The Golden Trade*, pp. 171ff.
30 Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p. 48; Schove, 'African Drought' in Dalby *et al. Drought in Africa*, p. 41.
31 J. Brignon *et al.*, *Histoire du Maroc* (Paris, Hatier, 1990), p. 192, map.
32 Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*, p. 243.
33 Brignon, *Histoire du Maroc*, pp. 242–3.
34 C. El Hamel, '"Race", Slavery and Islam in Maghrebi Mediterranean Thought: The Question of the *Haratin* in Morocco', *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2002, p. 45.
35 J. Wright, 'Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?', *The Journal of North African Studies,* Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 56, 58.
36 Webb, *Desert Frontier*, pp. 49, 64.
37 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade', Table 2.
38 M. Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (London, C. and W. Nicol, 1799), pp. 112–13.
39 Ibid., p. 192.
40 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade', Table 2.
41 Quoted in J.-C. Zeltner, *Tripoli, carrefour de l'Europe et des pays du Tchad, 1500–1795* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1992), pp. 236–7.
42 Ibid., pp. 236–7; F. Renault, 'La traite des esclaves noirs en Libye au XVIIIe siecle', *JAH*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1982, p. 170.
43 FO76/2, [British Consul, Tripoli, The Hon. Archibald Campbell] Fraser to [Principal Secretary of State, Earl] Shelbourne, 24th August 1767, enclosed, *Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the Tripoline Moors to the Inland Parts of Africa;* see also J. Wright, 'Sequins, Slaves and Senna: Tripoli's Intercontinental Trade in 1767', IsIAO (Rome), forthcoming.
44 M. Dyer, *The Foreign Trade of Western Libya, 1750–1830* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Boston University, Boston, MA, 1987), p. 125.
45 Renault, 'La traite des esclaves noirs', pp. 170, 176.
46 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade', Table 2.
47 Dyer, *The Foreign Trade*, p. 122.
48 Renault, 'La traite des esclaves noirs', p. 172.
49 FO 76/2, Fraser, *Some Account of the Trade.*
50 Ibid.
51 *Narrative of Ten Years' Residence at Tripoli in Africa* (London, Henry Colburn, 1817), p. 6.
52 Ibid., pp 2, 6, 7, 160.
53 FO 76/2, Fraser, *Some Account of the Trade.*
54 J. Wright, 'Fezzan and the Sahara in the early 19th Century', in Bruce-Lockhart and Wright, *Difficult and Dangerous Roads*, p. l.
55 *Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa*. Vol. I, pp. 103, 156–8, 171, 182, 184, 186–7.
56 Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 135, 141; Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. I, pp. 99, 102.
57 For biographical material on Warrington see entry by J. Wright in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004); Bovill, *Missions to the Niger*, Vol. I, pp. 151–61 and many other entries in Vols I–IV; *The Niger Explored* (London, Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 41–53 and

other entries; 'Colonel Warrington', *The Geographical Journal.* Vol. 131, Part 2, June 1965, pp. 161–5; Dearden, *A Nest of Corsairs*, pp. 223ff.
58 Lyon, *A Narrative*, especially Chapters IV–VII.
59 Bovill, *Missions to the Niger*, Vols II–IV; J. Bruce-Lockhart (ed.), *Clapperton in Borno: Journals of the Travels in Borno of Lieutenant Hugh Clapperton RN. from January 1823 to September 1824* (Cologne, Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 1996).
60 Bovill, *Missions to the Niger*, Vol. I, pp. 124–390.

5 Faith in abolition

1 Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, *passim*, and p. 11: '… the steady growth of Islamic abolitionist sentiment'.
2 See E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, André Deutsch, 1964), *passim*.
3 FO 76/2, Fraser to Shelbourne, 27th August 1767, enclosed, *Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the Tripoline Moors to the Interior Parts of Africa.*
4 *Narrative of a Ten Years' Residence at Tripoli in Africa*, pp. 6, 160.
5 For a rehearsal of many of the arguments, see Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara*, pp. 2–4; A.A. Boahen, 'The African Association, 1788–1805', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. V, Part I, 1961, p. 46.
6 Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, p. 298.
7 FO 76/12, Warrington to Bathurst, 9th October 1818.
8 [Swedish Consul, Tripoli] Graberg di Hemso, 'Prospetto del commercio di Tripoli d'Affrica e delle sue relazioni con quello dell'Italia', *Antologia, Giornale delle Scienze* (Florence), n. LXXXI, 1827, pp. 15–16.
9 FO 76/13, Warrington to Goulbourn, 5th June 1819.
10 Lyon, *A Narrative of Travels*.
11 Major Denham, Captain Clapperton and the late Dr Oudney, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824* (London, John Murray, 1826); see also Bovill, *Missions to the Niger*, Vols. II–IV; Bruce-Lockhart and Wright, *Difficult and Dangerous Roads.*
12 Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. III, pp. 549–50.
13 CO 2/13, Denham to Horton, 1st June 1825, reproduced in Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. IV, pp. 761–71.
14 Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. IV, p. 769.
15 Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 678, 682–3, 685, 753–4.
16 H. D'Ghies, *A Letter Addressed to James Scarlett, Esq., M.P., on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London, Printed for the Author, 1822).
17 *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 12th August 1840.
18 Y.H. Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996), pp. 70–1.
19 FO 84/333, Bidwell to Warrington, 5th July 1840.
20 FO 84/333, Palmerston to Warrington, 22nd October 1840.
21 J. Wright, 'Diplomacy and Tribalism: Consul Warrington and the Awlad Slaiman', *The Maghreb Review*, Vol. 22, Nos 1–2, 1997, pp. 104–5.
22 FO 84/333, Palmerston to Ponsonby, 22nd August and 9th November 1840.
23 H. Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa. The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger, 1841–1842* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 20–1. The character of Mrs Jellyby in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–53) parodies some of the popular enthusiasms in Britain in the 1840s for easy remedies for Africa's problems.
24 E.R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression, 1840–1890*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 94.
25 L.C. Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmed Bey* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University

Press, 1974), pp. 321–5; H. Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery, 1833–1870* (London, Longman, 1972), pp. 174–5. For the political and religious background, see K. Chater, 'Islam et réformes politiques dans la Tunisie au XIXème siècle', *The Maghreb Review*, Vol. 13, Nos 1–2, (1988), pp. 72–83.

26 FO 84/373, [British Consul, Tunis, Sir Thomas] Reade, to Palmerston, 30th April 1841.
27 FO 84/373, Palmerston to Reade, 22nd June 1841.
28 FO 84/373, Reade to Palmerston, 7th September 1841.
29 FO 84/427, Reade to [British Ambassador, Constantinople, Sir Stratford] Canning, 22nd March 1842. It has been suggested that far more important than freeing the relatively few black slaves in Tunis, the Bey's measure 'was to put an end to the recruitment of Mamluks from Istanbul to form the companions and personal staff of the princes of the Husaynid dynasty'. M. Brett, 'Modernisation in 19th Century North Africa', *The Maghreb Review*, Vol. 7, Nos 1–2, Jan–April 1982, p. 18.
30 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade', Table 2.
31 FO 84/427, Reade to [Foreign Secretary, Lord] Aberdeen, 19th January 1842.
32 FO 84/598, Reade to Aberdeen, 10th January 1845.
33 Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade', Table 2.
34 Wright, 'Morocco: The Last Great Slave Market?', pp. 60–1.
35 J.-L. Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe (1830–1894)*, (4 Vols, Paris, PUF, 1961–64), Vol. III, pp. 91–2.
36 FO 84/427 [Consul, Tangier, John Drummond] Hay to Aberdeen, 29th January 1842.
37 FO 84/427, Sultan Mulay Abd-al-Rahman to Hay, enclosed in Hay to Aberdeen, 12th March 1842.
38 FO 84/427, Sultan Mulay Abd-al-Rahman to Hay, 23rd March 1842.
39 FO 84/486, Hay to Aberdeen, 11th December 1843, enclosed, BFASS Petition to the Sultan.
40 FO 84/486, Hay to Aberdeen, 11th December 1843.
41 FO 84/540, Hay to Aberdeen, 18th March 1844, enclosed [Vice Consul, Mogador, William] Willshire to Hay, 6th March 1844.
42 FO 84/540, Hay to Aberdeen, 5th April 1844.
43 FO 99/81, Ben Driss to Hay, 5th Rabih 1262, quoted in Miège, *Le Maroc*, Vol. III, p. 91.
44 FO 84/258, [Consul, Alexandria, Colonel] Campbell, to Palmerston, 5th May 1838.

6 The slave trade through Murzuk

1 El-Hesnawi, *Fezzan under the Rule*, pp. 58–61; Lyon, *A Narrative of Travels*, pp. 97–100; Duveyrier, *Les Touareg du Nord*, p. 281; E. Petragnani, *Il Sahara Tripolitano* (Rome, Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1928), p. 108; According to J. Lethielleux, *Le Fezzan, ses jardins, ses palmiers* (Tunis, Bascone et Muscat, 1948), p. 18, n.48, the town walls had been entirely rebuilt in the 1760s after their destruction by the Pasha of Tripoli in 1732.
2 Duveyrier, *Les Touareg du Nord*, p. 281.
3 Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. II, p. 277 and n.2; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. I, p. 152; for plans of Murzuk in the mid-nineteenth century, see Barth, Vol. I, p. 155 and G. Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan.* Vol. I, pocket map.
4 Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan.* Vol. I, p. 84.
5 Friedrich Hornemann's letter to his mother, quoted in R. Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa … up to 1830* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 260; Richardson, *Travels in the Great Desert of Sahara in the Years 1845 and 1846*, Vol. II, p 347.

6 S. Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 60.
7 Briggs, *Tribes of the Sahara*, Map 3; Chapelle, *Nomades noirs*, Carte 1; A. Le Rouvreur, *Sahèliens et Sahariens du Tchad* (Paris, Bereger-Levrault, 1962), Carte 12.
8 F. Fugelstad, *A History of Niger, 1850–1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 25–7, 46–7; Baier, *An Economic History*, p. 38; R.A., Dunbar, 'Slavery and the Foundation of Nineteenth Century Damagaram (Zinder, Niger)' in Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, p. 158. But the Central African Mission in 1850 found the route anything but safe and orderly.
9 Minutilli, *La Tripolitania*, pp. 439–40; F. Coro 'Ghat, la sentinella sahariana' in *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, Anno I, Vol. I, 1938, pp. 298–306; R.A. Dunbar, *Damagaram (Zinder, Niger), 1812–1906: The History of a Central Sudanic Kingdom* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, 1970), p. 205.
10 Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, p. 21; J. Wright, 'The Wadai-Benghazi Slave Route' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, pp. 174–84.
11 J. Miller, Discussion Notes, 1988 Bellagio Workshop, quoted in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, pp. 3–4.
12 Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. I, p. 156; see also FO 101/30, Barth (Murzuk) to Bunsen, 30th May 1850: 'There is no money at all in this place, indeed not a single farthing'.
13 FO 101/26, Richardson (Murzuk) to Palmerston, 27th May 1850; see also Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission to Central Africa*, Vol. I, pp. 90–1.
14 E. Vogel to the German geographer Augustus Petermann, quoted in E. Vogel, 'A Mission to Central Africa', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. XXV, 1855, p. 239; see also Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. I, p. 156.
15 Giambattista Gagliuffi, born 1798, was a native of the Republic of Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik in Croatia). His family later moved to Sardinia and then to Malta before Giambattista, aged 18, settled in Tripoli as a trader. He spoke and wrote Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Italian, 'Sardinian' and 'Illyrian'. Consul Warrington persuaded him that he would make his fortune as a trader and unpaid British Vice Consul in Murzuk. See FO 101/20, Gagliuffi's *Memorial and Application for British Naturalisation*, 15th November 1848, enclosed in Governor of Malta to Earl Grey, 25th November 1848.
16 For the location of Gagliuffi's house in Murzuk, see Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. I, p. 155, sketch-plan of Murzuk; Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, Vol. I, end map insert, *Plan von Murzuk.*
17 FO 84/486, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 11th November 1843, enclosed in Warrington to [Foreign Secretary, Lord] Aberdeen, 21st December 1843.
18 For Dixon Denham's colourful description of a private slave sale in Murzuk in the 1820s, see Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. II, pp. 279–81.
19 FO 84/540, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 24th January 1844, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, 24th February 1844. According to Gagliuffi's own statistical breakdown, the number of slaves arrived in Murzuk was exactly 1,800 and not 'about l,600'. To that total must be added the 200 'who passed as servants and concubines', making 2,000 in all.
20 FO 84/540, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 24th January 1844.
21 D.C. Tambo, 'The Sokoto Caliphate Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9, 1976, pp. 206–7.
22 Bruce-Lockhart and Wright, *Difficult and Dangerous Roads*, p. 282.
23 FO 84/737, [Consul, Tripoli, George] Crowe to Palmerston, 28th February 1848; FO 84/815, Crowe to Palmerston, 20th January 1850.
24 FO 84/019, Gagliuffi to [Consul, Tripoli, George] Herman, 31st December 1853,

enclosed in Herman to [Foreign Secretary, Earl] Clarendon, 20th January 1854; see also Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission*, Vol. II, pp. 92–3.

25 See Lyon, *A Narrative of Travels*, p. 326.

26 See J. Wright, *Libya* (London, Ernest Benn, 1969), Plate: 'The remains of a slave who died on the desert crossing. Several slaves were shackled to the iron bar.' This melancholy scene was found and photographed in 1966 by Rosario Casella of Tripoli.

27 Petragnani, *Il Sahara Tripolitano*, p. 241: note his use of the present tense. The same point was also made by Lyon in *A Narrative of Travels*, p. 122.

28 Tambo, 'The Sokoto Caliphate', p. 96.

29 Mack, 'Women and Slavery' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, p. 100.

30 Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. II, p. 148; see also Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, p. 336: 'I may venture to state … that very few female slaves who have passed their tenth year, reach Egypt or Arabia in a state of virginity.'

31 FO 84/598, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 4th January 1845, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, lst February 1845.

32 FO 84/693, Crowe (quoting Gagliuffi despatch, nd., but probably 31st December 1846) to Palmerston, 10th February 1847.

33 FO 84/919, Gagliuffi to Herman, 31st December 1853, enclosed *Quadro di Schiavi arrivati in questa Città nel 1853*, enclosed in Herman to Clarendon, 20th January 1854. Gagliuffi's total of prices is added incorrectly.

34 FO 101/16, Richardson to Warrington, 11th May 1846, enclosed, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert; The Souk at Ghat.* See also Mack, 'Women and Slavery', p. 101.

35 FO 84/949, Herman to Clarendon, 22nd January 1855, enclosed Gagliuffi's *Prospetto del numero di Schiavi arrivati in Mourzouk nell Corso dell'anno 1854.*

36 FO 84/919, Gagliuffi to Herman, 31st December 1852, enclosed in Herman to Clarendon, 14th March 1853; Gagliuffi to Herman, 31st December 1853, enclosed in Herman to Clarendon, 20th January 1854.

37 FO 84/598, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 4th January 1845, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, 1st February 1845.

38 M.A. Klein, 'The Slave Trade in the Western Sudan during the Nineteenth Century' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, p. 54.

39 For an appreciation of James Richardson's great but neglected achievements both as an abolitionist and Saharan traveller, see A.A. Boahen, 'James Richardson. The Forgotten Philanthropist and Explorer', *The Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III, December 1964, pp. 61–71.

40 Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission*, Vol. II, pp. 202–4; Tambo, 'The Sokoto Caliphate', Appendix.

41 FO 101/16, Richardson, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert.*

42 FO 84/540, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 22nd January 1844, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, 28th February 1844.

43 FO 84/598, Gagliuffi to Warrington, 4th January 1845, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, 1st February 1845.

44 FO 84/737, Crowe to Palmerston, 28th February 1848, quoting undated Gagliuffi despatch.

45 FO 84/815, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, George] Herman to Crowe, 23rd May 1850, enclosed in Crowe to Palmerston, 12th June 1850.

46 FO 160/13, [Vice Consul, Ghadames, Charles] Dickson to Crowe, 10th June 1851; see also Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. I, p. 400.

47 FO 84/919, Gagliuffi to Herman, 31st December 1852, enclosed in Herman to Clarendon, 14th March 1853. Such a ration seems to have allowed each slave less than half a pound of food a day.

48 FO 101/16, Richardson, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert.*

49 Barth *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. III, p. 606.
50 FO 101/16, Richardson, *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert.*
51 'Tebu' is used as a general description for a family of black, but not negro, aboriginal peoples of the Sahara and Sudan. Known by many different names – Tebu, Teda, Teda-Tou, Daza, Daza-Gada. Kreda, Gorane, Bidayet, Zaghawa, Braouia, Ikaraden – they have certain distinct racial, linguistic and cultural characteristics in common. For accounts of the Tebu, see Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, Vol. I; Briggs, *Tribes of the Sahara*, Chapter 6; Chapelle, *Nomades noirs, passim*; Le Rouvreur, *Sahèliens et Sahariens, passim*; W. Cline, *The Teda of Tibesti, Borku and Kawar in the Eastern Sahara* (Menasha,WI, George Banta Publishing Co., 1950), *passim.*
52 Chapelle, *Nomades noirs*, p. 343. Cline believes on the other hand that the Teda 'seem to have treated their domestic slaves humanely' (*The Teda of Tibesti*, p. 42). But Nachtigal found in 1869 that the near-naked black slaves of the Tebu of Tibesti were 'subjected to nothing short of a continuous starvation diet' (*Sahara and Sudan*, Vol. I, p. 324).
53 Chapelle, *Nomades noirs*, pp. 343–4.
54 F. Rodd, *People of the Veil* (London, Macmillan, 1926), p. 236.
55 FO 160/13, Dickson to Crowe, 16th July 1851.
56 FO 84/773 [Acting Vice Consul, Tripoli, John] Reade to Palmerston, 24th August 1849.
57 Contained in FO 160/12, Gagliuffi to Reade, 14th September 1849. The original Italian despatch was copied into a letter-book in a very poor and careless hand and is very difficult to read.
58 FO 84/815, Crowe to Palmerston, 20th January 1850, quoting unidentified Gagliuffi despatch.
59 Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, pp. 112–14; Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 94–124.
60 Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern. World Society, 1815–1830* , p. 342; M.J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1975).
61 E. Ingram (ed.), *Eastern Questions in the Nineteenth Century. Collected Essays by Allan Cunningham* (London, F. Cass, 1993), Vol. 2, p. 76.
62 Rossi, *Storia di Tripoli*, p. 317.
63 For instance, the Sardinian Consul in Benghazi reported on 2nd June 1850 that five or six thousand slaves had died on the road from Wadai during that year alone. Rossi, *Storia di Tripoli*, pp. 116–17 and n.14.

7 The slave trade through Ghadames and Ghat

1 For the antiquity of Ghadames, see A. Merighi, *La Tripolitania antica dalle origini alla invasione degli Arabi* (2 Vols, Intra, Verbania, A. Airoldi, 1940), Vol. I, pp. 166–70, Vol. II, pp. 207–8.
2 Major Alexander Laing in 1825 estimated that the town and its gardens covered 'the space of about four miles only in circumference, and had about 6,000 people'. (CO 2/15, Laing, *Notes on Ghadamis*, reproduced in Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. I, pp. 374–85.) In 1845 James Richardson calculated there were only 3,000 people in Ghadames, including 300 'slaves and strangers'. (FO 101/16, Richardson to Warrington, 13th November 1845, enclosed, *An Account of the City of Ghadames.*) Fifteen years later, the former British Vice Consul in Ghadames put the population at 4,000. (C.H. Dickson, 'Account of Ghadames', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. XXX (1860), p. 256). Henri Duveyrier in the same year estimated it at only 3,000 (*Journal de Route* (Paris, A. Challamel, 1905), p. 105).
3 A. Martel, *Les confins saharo-tripolitaines de la Tunisie (1881–1911)*, (2 Vols, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), Tome premier, Map 1; K. Chater,

Dépendance et mutations pré-coloniales: la Régence de Tunisie de 1815 à 1857 (Tunis, Université de Tunis, 1984), map on p. 44; L. Valensi, *On the Eve of Colonialism. North Africa before the French Conquest, 1790–1830* (New York, Africana Publishing,1977), p. 44.

4 M. El Hachaichi, *Voyage au pays Senoussia* (Paris, A. Challamel, 1903), pp. 27, 220–2; see also L. Brenner, 'The North African Community in the Nineteenth Century Sudan' in D.F. McCall and N.R. Bennett, *Aspects of West African Islam* (Boston, MA, Boston University Press, 1971), pp. 146–50; L.G. Colvin, 'The Commerce of Hausaland, 1780–1833' in ibid., p. 122; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. 3, pp. 325, 366.

5 Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger*, p. 61; for further details of Ghadamsi trade and finance, see pp. 61–3, 73–4.

6 CO 2/15, Laing, *Notes on Ghadames;* Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. I, p. 378.

7 P. Ward, *Touring Libya, The Western Provinces* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 83; A. Piccioli, *The Magic Gate of the Sahara* (London, Methuen, 1935), p. 229, also plate opposite p. 230; Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, Fig. 7.

8 FO 77/3, [Acting Consul, Tunis, Robert] Traill to [Secretary of State, Foreign Office, Lord] Sydney, 1st February 1789.

9 FO 84/648, Warrington to Aberdeen, 20th March 1846; FO 160/13, Dickson to Crowe, 19th August 1850, enclosed, *Slave Trade of Ghadames.*

10 FO 101/26, Richardson (Tripoli) to Palmerston, 16th February 1850.

11 CO 2/15, Laing, *Notes on Ghadames;* Bovill, *Missions*, Vol. I, pp. 263–5, 266–7.

12 FO 84/598, Richardson (Tripoli) to Warrington, 30th July 1845, enclosed in Warrington to Aberdeen, 2nd August 1845; see also Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. I, pp. 2–3; Boahen, 'James Richardson, The Forgotten Philanthropist and Explorer', pp. 62–3.

13 FO 101/16, Richardson to Warrington, 24th and 25th October, 13th November 1845, enclosed, *An Account of the City of Ghadames.*

14 FO 101/16. Richardson, *City of Ghadames.*

15 Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. I, pp. 259–60.

16 FO 101/18, Private letter, Crowe to Bidwell, 31st March 1847.

17 According to Vice Consul Dickson, Ghadames used to pay the Karamanli pashas of Tripoli £125 Sterling/year 'in consideration of certain immunities which this city enjoyed and of having no restrictions on the internal commerce'. In 1844 the new Turkish administration raised the tribute to over £1,000/year and established a series of tariffs: FO 160/13, Dickson to Crowe, 19th August 1850.

18 FO 160/13, Dickson, *Slave Trade of Ghadames.*

19 Ibid.

20 *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, London*, Vol. I, Sessions 1855–56, p. 114: Dr Heinrich Barth's remarks on being awarded the Patron's Gold Medal, 26th May 1856.

21 D.C.M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825* (Hamden, CT, Archen Books, 1971), p. 56: 'Even the commercial returns required of consuls as a matter of annual routine were regularly seen by the Secretary of State before they were sent to the Board of Trade.'

22 FO 160/13, Dickson to [Consul, Tripoli, George] Herman, 31st December 1853.

23 FO 84/885, Crowe to Palmerston, 31st January 1852, quoting unenclosed Dickson despatch.

24 Dickson, 'Account of Ghadames', p. 259.

25 Richardson, *Travels*, Vol. I, pp. 258–9. It was unlikely that the slaves Richardson saw were natives of Bornu itself; they probably came from much further south.

26 Dickson, 'Account of Ghadames', p. 259; Duveyrier, *Les Touareg du Nord*, p. 265.

27 FO 160/13, Dickson, *Slave Trade of Ghadames.*

28 Valensi, *On the Eve of Colonialism*, p. 45.
29 J.-L. Miège, 'La Libye et le commerce transsaharien au XIXe siècle', *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerrannée*, No. 19, 1er sémestre, 1975, p. 138; C.W. Newbury, 'North Africa and the Western Sudan Trade in the Nineteenth Century', *JAH*, VII, 2, 1966, p. 9.
30 Richardson, *Narrative of a Mission*, Vol. I, pp. 160–1; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries*, Vol. I, p. 193, Duveyrier; *Les Touareg du Nord*, pp. 268–70.
31 R, Micacchi, 'Tripolitania dal 1835 al 1858', *Rivista delle Colonie Italiane*, Anno XI, n.8, agosto 1937, pp. 976–7 and n.1.
32 FO 101/16, Richardson, *An Account of the City of Ghadames*, Appendix No. 1 'Routes'.
33 FO 97/430, Richardson, *Report on the Slave Trade of the Great Desert* (1846); FO 101/16, Richardson to Warrington, 27th August 1845.
34 FO 101/23, Richardson to Palmerston, 5th October 1848, Enclosure 'B', *Plan of the Establishment of the British Consulate in the Great Desert of Sahara.*
35 FO 101/16, Richardson (Murzuk) to Aberdeen, 28th February 1846. But in his *Travels* of 1848 (Vol. II, p. 14), Richardson suggested 'it could certainly be done for some 500 dollars per annum, or for very little more, if it were a question of money only'.
36 Richardson's reports of his Saharan travels in 1845–46 are to be found in FO 101/16 *The Slave Trade of Ghat and the Great Desert, The Souk at Ghat*; in FO 97/430, *Report on the Slave Trade of the Great Desert*, reproduced in the *Journal of the Anti-Slavery Society*, London, September and October 1846; and also summarised in his two-volume *Travels* of 1848.
37 The 'Mountains of the Moon' (a term dating back at least to Classical Antiquity) appear on Major James Rennell's *Map of African Discovery* of 1798. They are shown at Donga, south of 'Dar Foor' and are marked as the source of the Bahr Abiad or White River (Nile). They are still shown in much the same location on Arrowsmith's map of North Western Africa of 1834.
38 FO 101/16, Richardson, *The Souk at Ghat.*
39 FO 97/430, Richardson, *Report on the Slave Trade.*
40 FO 101/16, Richardson, *The Souk at Ghat.*
41 See FO 101/20, Dickson to Bidwell, 12th November 1848 enclosed, *Return of Caravans Arrived at the Town of Tripoli from 1st January to 21st August 1848.*
42 FO 101/16, Richardson, *An Account of the City of Ghadames.*
43 FO 84/737, Crowe to Palmerston, 4th April 1848, quoting from Gagliuffi despatch, 11th March 1848, quoting in turn from a letter from Haj al-Amin, brother of the Governor of Ghat, to Gagliuffi, n.d.
44 FO 84/1028, Herman to Clarendon, 15th November 1856, enclosed [Acting Vice Consul, Murzuk, Gaetano] de Fremaux to Herman, 18th October 1856; FO 84/1062, Herman to Malmesbury, 22nd May 1858, enclosed, *Translation of a Petition [to the Pasha of Tripoli] presented by Slave Merchants of Fezzan and Ghadames at Present in Tripoli.*
45 FO 97/430, Richardson, *Report on the Slave Trade.*
46 Ibid., see also *Travels*, Vol. II, pp. 477–8.

8 The Wadai road

1 According to Oric Bates, there were 100,000 palms there in the early twentieth century. *The Eastern Libyans*, p. 10. Augila was noted by Herodotus as a centre of date production: *The Histories*, IV, 183, p. 303.
2 Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, p. 129.
3 FO 101/18, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, Francis Hastings] Gilbert to Crowe, 27th September 1847, enclosed, *Report on Benghazi.*

4 J. R. Pacho, *Relation d'un voyage dans la Marmarique, la Cyrenaique et les oasis d'Audjelah et de Maradeh* (2 Vols, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1827), Vol. Texte, pp. 277–8; see also folding map opposite p. XXXII. Pacho was from Nice, ceded to France by Piedmont in 1860.
5 J. Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa* (London, John Murray, 1856), pp. 195–6.
6 J. Wright, 'The Wadai-Benghazi Slave Route' in Savage, *The Human Commodity*, p. 174.
7 For an account of how the road was reopened, see R.A. Bagnold, *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1941). pp. 188–9. According to one source, the road was reopened in 1814: C. Piazza, 'Statistiche sul commercio di Benghazi (1828)'. *Africa*, anno XXXIX, n.l, marzo 1984, pp. 57–69.
8 H. Duveyrier, *La confrérie musulmane de Sidi Mohammed ben Ali es-Senousi et son domaine géographique, etc.* (Paris, Société de Géographie, 1884), p. 18–20; E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (London, Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 16; N. Ziadeh, *Sanusiya. A Study of a Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Leiden, Brill, 1983), pp. 49–50; D.D. Cordell, 'Eastern Libya, Wadai and the Sanusiya: a Tariqa and a Trade Route', *JAH*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1977, pp. 21–36; C. Ciammaichella, *Libyens et Francais au Tchad (1897–1914): La confrérie senoussie et le commerce transsaharien* (Paris, CNRS, 1987), pp. 27–67.
9 Wright, *Libya, Chad*, p. 97; Cordell, 'Eastern Libya'; A.M. Hassanein Bey, *The Lost Oases* (London, Thornton Butterworth. 1925), pp. 64–5.
10 J.-L. Miège, preface to Ciammaichella, *Libyens et Francais.*
11 Wright, *Libya, Chad*, p. 103. See also H.J. Fisher and V. Rowland, 'Firearms in the Central Sudan'. *JAH*, XII, 2, 1971, pp. 215–39.
12 Duveyrier, *La confrérie*, p. 19; A. Sabatini, 'Cufra e le sue genti', *Rivista delle Colonie (L'Oltremare)*, Anno IX, n. 12, dicembre 1936, pp. 1191, 1205; 'Prigionia di un soldato italiano a Cufra (Memorie)', *Rivista delle Colonie*, Anno I, 1927, p. 15; Ciammaichella, *Libyens et francais*, pp. 17–24.
13 Quoted in Cromer, Earl of, *Modern Egypt* (London, Macmillan, 1911), p. 491, n.1.
14 R. Forbes, *The Secret of the Sahara: Kufara* (London, Cassell, 1921), pp. 205–6; Hassanein Bey, *The Lost Oases*, pp. 64–5.
15 For estimates of days of travel on the Wadai road's stages, see Minutilli, *La Tripolitania*, p. 137 and Ciammaichella, *Libyens et francais*, chart on p. 33. They do not agree, Minutilli allowing 70 days for the journey from Benghazi to the capital of Wadai at Abeche, Ciammaichella 61 days.
16 FO 101/29 [Vice Consul, Benghazi, George] Herman to Palmerston, 12th October 1851, enclosed, *Memorandum on the Caravan Road from Wadai to Benghazi.*
17 'Prigionia di un soldato italiano a Cufra (Memorie)', p. 18.
18 FO 84/373, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, Thomas] Wood to Warrington, 22nd June 1841, enclosed in Warrington to Palmerston, 20th July 1841.
19 British Parliamentary Papers, *Slavery*, 1848, Gilbert to Crowe, 10th September 1847, enclosed in Crowe to Palmerston, 27th September 1847. Slaves who trudged across the plains of the Sahara often had their feet badly burned by the hot sands; many also had swollen feet. Some early European travellers in the Sahara also suffered painful swellings of the leg, a condition only recently recognised to be caused by particles of silica in sand penetrating the feet and lower legs and, through the lymphatic vessels, causing blockages leading to swellings (as in *elephantiasis*). See Bruce-Lockhart and Wright, *Difficult and Dangerous Roads*, pp. 109–10, n.16.
20 FO 84/815, Herman to Crowe, 23rd May 1850, enclosed, *State of the Wady Caravan and the Estimate of the Value of Slaves and Merchandise (Arrived 18th May 1850)*, enclosed in Crowe to Palmerston, 12th June 1850.

21 *Ferronière* was originally a tiara with a single precious stone; it was named after the favourite of Francois 1er (1515–47), 'La Belle Ferronière' who wears one in the portrait attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. The *ferronière* returned to fashion in the early nineteenth century, hence Herman's familiarity with a term that he could assume his readers shared.
22 FO 84/815, Herman to Crowe (private letter), enclosed in Crowe to Palmerston, 12th June 1850.
23 FO 101/29, Herman, *Memorandum on the Wady Caravan.*
24 FO 84/373, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, Thomas] Wood to Warrington, 22nd June 1841, enclosed in Warrington to Palmerston, 20th July 1841.
25 FO 84/737, Frederick Crowe to George Crowe, 5th June 1848.
26 See 'Note Tripoline' in *Bollettino della Società Africana d'Italia*, Anno III, Fasc. IV, agosto 1884, pp. 88–90.
27 Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, Vol. III, p. 91.
28 Caillié, *Travels through Central Africa*, Vol. II, pp. 87–205.
29 G. Rohlfs, *Kufra, Reise von Tripolis nach der Oase Kufra* (Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1881).
30 Forbes, *The Secret of Sahara;* Hassanein Bey, *The Lost Oases.*
31 R. F. Clarke, *Cardinal Lavigerie and the African Slave Trade* (London, Longmans, Green, 1889), pp. 251–2.
32 Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, p. 29.
33 W.K.R. Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah* (Ilfracombe, Arthur R. Stockwell, 1977), pp. 166–7.
34 Ibid., pp. 131, 174, nn. 48, 49.
35 Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti*, Fig. 5, p. 118.
36 Ibid., Fig. 6, p. 118.
37 FO 101/18, Gilbert to Crowe, 27th September 1847, enclosed, *Report on Benghazi.*
38 British Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence with British Representatives and Agents Abroad … Relative to the Slave Trade* (London, 1880), Vol. 180.
39 Figures and estimates based on Murzuk and Benghazi Vice Consular despatches for 1849 (FO 84/774 and 815).
40 J.-L. Triaud, *La légende noire de la Sanusiyya. Une confrérie musulmane saharienne sous le regard francais (1840–1930)*, (2 Vols, Paris, Maison des Socétés de l'Homme, 1995) Vol, I, Tableau 9.3, p. 585.
41 See P. A. Penfold (ed.), *Maps and Plans in the Public Record Office. 3. Africa.* (London, HMSO, 1982), Items 515 and 516: Maps FO 925/2941 and FO 925/1074.
42 H.M. De Mathuisieulx, *La Tripolitaine d'hier et de demain* (Paris, Hachette, 1912), p. 98.
43 Triaud, *La légende noire*, Vol. I, pp. 582–8.
44 E. Pasha, in S. Bono (ed.), *Diario della guerra libica* (Bologna, Cappelli, 1986), p. 67. One cannot imagine he had much immediate use for the ivory either.
45 Wright, 'The Wadai-Benghazi Slave route', p. 182.

9 The slave trade between Sahara and Mediterranean

1 FO 84/974, [Consul, Prevesa, Albania, Sidney Smith] Saunders to Clarendon, 10th June 1855.
2 FO 84/693, Crowe to Palmerston, 1st January 1847.
3 FO 101/18, Crowe to Palmerston, 26th May 1847, enclosed, *Report on the Commerce of Tripoli.*
4 FO 101/20, Dickson to Bidwell, 17th November 1848, and enclosure, *Return of Caravans arrived at the Town of Tripoli from 1st January to 31st August 1848.*
5 FO 160/65, Crowe to Palmerston, 9th November 1847.

6 FO 84/737, Crowe to Palmerston, 23rd June 1848.
7 FO 84/974, Saunders to Clarendon, 30th June 1855; the Italians were later to make similar claims about the oasis of Kufra.
8 Baer, 'Slavey in Nineteenth Century Egypt', p. 425.
9 Filesi, 'La reggenza di Tripoli', p. 237.
10 L.V. Bertarelli (ed.), *Guida d'Italia del TCI: Possedimenti e colonie* (Milan, TCI, 1929), p. 286; see also P. Ward, *Tripoli, Portrait of a City* (Stoughton, WI, Oleander Press, 1969), map opposite p. 34.
11 FO 101/20, Crowe to Palmerston, 26th November 1848, enclosed *Return of the Mortality of Slaves in the Town of Tripoli from January 1845 to August 1848.*
12 D. Panzac, *La Peste dans l'Empire Ottoman, 1700–1850* (Leuven, Peeters, 1985), pp. 508, 609; FO 101/24, Crowe to Bidwell, 8th August 1850; Crowe to Palmerston, 31st August 1850.
13 Milanesi, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, p. 348.
14 Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa*, Vol. I, p. 208; *Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa*, Vol. I, pp. 47–195.
15 P. Della Cella, *Viaggio da Tripoli di Barbaria alle frontiere occidentali dell'Egitto* (Città di Castello, Comando del Corpo di Stato Maggiore, 1912), p. 34.
16 G.H. Blake, 'The Form and Function of Misratah's Commercial Centre'. *Bulletin of the Society of Arts, University of Libya*, Vol. 2, 1968, pp. 9–40.
17 FO 101/33, Herman to Clarendon, 14th September 1853.
18 FO 84/949, Herman to Clarendon, 22nd January 1855; FO 84/1000, Herman to Clarendon, 26th January 1856.
19 Bruce-Lockhart and Wright, *Difficult and Dangerous Roads*, pp. 261–8; 339–42.
20 Rossi, *Storia di Tripoli*, p. 318.
21 F. Valori, *Storia della Cirenaica* (Florence, Sansoni, 1961), p. 107; H.M. Bulugma, *Benghazi through the Ages* (Benghazi, 1972), pp. 46–8.
22 FO 101/22, Herman to Palmerston, 25th January 1849, enclosed, *A General Report on the Eastern Part of the Regency of Tripoli.*
23 Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa*, pp. 5, 7, 8.
24 British Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and Papers, 1880, Vol. 5, pp. 180–1, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, J. Hutton] Dupuis to [Foreign Secretary, Lord] Salisbury, 31st March 1879.
25 FO 84/949, Herman to Clarendon, 20th January 1854, enclosed, *Exports Derna;* Herman to Clarendon, 22nd January 1855, enclosed, *Exports Derna.*
26 FO 84/1000, Ongley to Lord Stratford (Sir Stratford Canning), 18th April 1856 and enclosure.
27 F.R. Toledano, 'Slave Dealers, Women, Pregnancy and Abortion: The Story of a Circassian Slave Girl in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cairo', *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 2, No. 1, May 1981, pp. 55–6.
28 There is no certain information about the ending of the black slave trade through Benghazi. The Italians rightly claim credit for ending slavery in Libya between their 1911 invasion and completion of Cyrenaica's conquest in 1931–32, although they were not wholly effective. See F. Valori, 'L'abolizione della schiavitù in Cirenaica', *Rivista della Colonie*, Vol. XIV, n.9, settembre 1940, pp. 263–68; Rossi, *Storia di Tripoli*, pp. 318–19.

10 The Mediterranean middle passage

1 FO 84/258. [Consul, Alexandria, R.] Thurburn to Palmerston, 14th August 1838: the Mediterranean traffic, he reported, was 'not attended with any of those horrors which stigmatise the traffic on the western coast of Africa'.
2 'Tutta la sicurezza sta nel non incontrare nessuno'.Della Cella, *Viaggio da Tripoli di Barbaria*, pp. 9–10.

3 F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London, Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 113, 268.
4 FO 84/949, [Vice Consul, Canea, H.S.] Ongley to [British Ambassador, Constantinople, Lord] Stratford de Redcliffe, 12th May 1855.
5 Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, Vol. I, p. 39.
6 R. Pennell, 'Tripoli in the Mid-Eighteenth Century. A Guidebook to the City', *Revue d'Histoire Maghrèbine*, Nos 27–28, dècembre 1982, p. 119.
7 Renault, 'La traite des esclaves noirs en Libye', pp. 164–5.
8 D. Panzac, 'La Régence de Tunis et la mer à l'époque de Hammouda Pacha Bey (1782–1814)', *Les Cahiers de Tunisie.* Tome XLVI, No. 165, 3e sémestre 93, pp. 67–9.
9 Zeltner, *Tripoli, carrefour de l'Europe et des pays du Tchad, 1500–1795*, p. 233.
10 FO 76/2, [Consul, Tripoli, The Hon. Archibald] Fraser to [Principal Secretary of State, Lord] Shelbourne, 26th August 1767, enclosed, *Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the Tripoline Moors in the Inland Parts of Africa.*
11 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, pp. 624–6; FO 76/34, Warrington to Hay, 13th May 1833, enclosed, *Extrait d'une Dépeche du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères au Consul Général de France à Tripoli de Barbarie, le 8 avril 1832.*
12 FO 76/34, Warrington to [Secretary of State, Colonial Office] Stanley, 10th July and 16th August 1833.
13 M.T. Lo Celso, 'Approcci del Regno delle Due Sicilie per allacciare rapporti commerciali con Tripoli di Barberia verso la metà del XIX secolo', *Africa*, Vol. 22, No.4, dicembre 1967, pp. 406–12.
14 A.I. Gencer, 'Marine à vapeur et charbon Turc en Méditerrannée orientale au XIXe siècle', *Revue de l'occident musulman et de la Méditerrannée*, Vol. 39, No.1, 1985, pp. 107–8; A. Palmer, *The Decline of the Ottoman Empire* (London, John Murray, 1992), p. 96.
15 J. Wright, 'The Mediterranean Middle Passage: The Nineteenth Century Slave Trade between Tripoli and the Levant', *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, Summer 1996, p. 43.
16 FO 84/427. [Consul, Tangiers, John Drummond] Hay to [Foreign Secretary, Lord] Aberdeen, 12th March 1842.
17 FO 84/648, Hay to Aberdeen, 12th and 17th June 1846.
18 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, p. 654.
19 J.Wright, 'Enforced Migration The Black Slave Trade across the Mediterranean', *The Maghreb Review*, Vol. 31, Nos 1–2, 2006, pp. 66–7; V. Laszlo and R. Woodman, *The Story of Sail* (London, Chatham Publishing, 1999), pp. 241–3.
20 FO 84/1000, [Vice Consul, Canea, H.S.] Ongley to [Ambassador, Constantinople, Lord] Stratford de Redcliffe, 25th April 1856.
21 FO 84/1000, [Vice Consul, Benghazi, Paolo] Xerri to [Consul General, Tripoli, George] Herman, enclosed in Herman to [Foreign Secretary, Earl] Clarendon, 16th November, 1856.
22 FO 160/65, [Consul General, Tripoli, George] Crowe to Palmerston, 27 May 1847.
23 H. S. Klein, *The Middle Passage. Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1978), Tables 7.2 and 8.1.
24 FO 84/947, Ongley to Lord Stratford, 12th May 1855.
25 Lo Celso, 'Approcci', p. 412.
26 Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression*, p. 39.
27 Wright, 'The Mediterranean Middle Passage', p. 49.
28 Gencer, 'Marine à vapeur', pp. 107–8.
29 Ibid., p. 109.
30 C. Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 47, quoting Kay, *Sketches of Turkey in 1831–32*, p. 120.

31 FO 101/17, Canning to Aberdeen, 25th April 1842.
32 See H. Farmayan and E.L.Daniel (eds), *A Shi'ite Pilgrimage to Mecca, 1885–1886* (London, Saqi Books, 1990), pp. 226–7.
33 FO 84/258. Thurburn to Palmerston, 16th July 1838.
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11 Morocco: The last great slave market

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12 The delusions of abolition

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11 Maps

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